

Wellbeing, measurement and public policy: *A review of current international and Australian work*

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In the past few years, there has been strong and broad growth in the worldwide movement to develop new progress measures and new approaches to government and the economy built around the goal of equitable and sustainable wellbeing 'beyond GDP'. In Australia, growing interest has been shown at both state and (most recently) federal government levels.

Increasingly, the focus is moving beyond the development of better and more holistic measures of national and community progress, onto the question of how to build these measures and approaches into government to guide policymaking, budgets and economic development. Some of the key projects and reports are described below, and a summary of the approaches that different countries are taking to build wellbeing into government is included in the Appendix.

INTERNATIONAL WORK

OECD and the new Wellbeing Centre (WISE)

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

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

See on recent WISE Centre and OECD work generally:

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

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

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

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UN Sustainable Development Goals

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

Two important recent developments from the UN:

Our Common Agenda: In 2021, the UN Secretary General released the report 'Our Common Agenda' which he described as 'an agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing (UN) agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals'. The key points for action included this:

'(N)ow is the time to correct a glaring blind spot in how we measure economic prosperity and progress. When profits come at the expense of people and our planet, we are left with an incomplete picture of the true cost of economic growth. As currently measured, gross domestic product (GDP) fails to capture the human and environmental destruction of some business activities. I call for new measures to complement GDP, so that people can gain a full understanding of the impacts of business activities and how we can and must do better to support people and our planet.'

The report also proposes a 'Summit of the Future to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like'.

Stockholm +50 Conference: In June this year, at the UN Stockholm + 50 conference on the environment, there was strong support for accelerated development of wellbeing economies and measurement frameworks. This included a proposal to set up a 'High Ambition Coalition on Wellbeing Economies' and a possible Inter-Governmental Co-ordinating Panel on Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and the Economy, (like the IPCC, even if not as large-scale) to, among other things, develop a better international progress indicator than GDP. There is also a recommendation to adopt legislation like Wales's (below). The video of the session at Stockholm is inspiring, especially the contribution by Sophie Howe, the Welsh Commissioner for Future Generations.

See:

Our Common Agenda report: <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda>

Report on Stockholm +50 Workshop and communique:

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

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

European Union 'Beyond GDP' Initiative

In 2007, the EU hosted an international conference in the European Parliament entitled 'Beyond GDP: Measuring progress, true wealth and the wellbeing of nations'. This led to the development of the EU's Europe-wide 'Beyond GDP' initiative, which has steadily grown in scope and influence. Two recent initiatives in this program include: the development of a new composite indicator, the [Transitions Performance Index \(TPI\)](#) that monitors and ranks countries on their transitions towards fair and prosperous sustainability, 'to offer a more holistic view of a country's progress' than GDP; and a report on 'Accounting for ecosystems and their services in the European Union'.

See: For background on EU Beyond GDP initiative

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/beyond_gdp/background_en.html

For latest news on EU Beyond GDP: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/beyond_gdp/news_en.html

International 'Wellbeing Economy Alliance' (WEAll) group

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

See recent WEAll report:

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

Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) Group

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

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

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

Wales Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

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

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

New Zealand

New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to introduce a 'Wellbeing budget' (in 2019) and recently produced its fourth such budget. The Wellbeing Budget is underpinned by a strong Living Standards Framework developed by the NZ Treasury and a separately developed wellbeing framework ('Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand') produced by Statistics New Zealand. The LSF seeks to put a value on both current and future wellbeing, such as natural and human assets and was partly inspired by an earlier Australian Treasury model. While it is still developing and has some critics, the success of the NZ project to date, and its growing international recognition, has been largely due to the strong support and leadership by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Finance Minister Grant Robertson, and the central role of NZ Treasury.

See:

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

Canada National Quality of Life Framework and strategy

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

See:

Canadian Index of Wellbeing: <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/>

Key Canadian government reports from DoF and Stats Can:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/measuring-what-matters-toward-quality-life-strategy-canada.html>

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2021006-eng.htm>

Nova Scotia recent work: <https://engagenovascotia.ca>

Newfoundland and Labrador: www.nl.communityaccounts.ca

United Kingdom

The What Works Wellbeing Centre: This is an independent centre set up in London in 2014, aimed to ‘put wellbeing at the heart of policy’ and improve decision-making by government, business and the community. It does this by promoting wellbeing evidence and disseminating practical examples and case studies of successful wellbeing programs across all fields of policy. and policies. WWW has become a national and international clearing-house on wellbeing and public policy, and its most recent projects examine wellbeing values and perspectives in: arts and culture; data analysis; corporate boards and governance; student mental health; local and social connections; loneliness; and dying.

The UK Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill 2021: Initiated and passed in the House of Lords, this far-reaching legislation was inspired by the Welsh act above, and is now (September 2022) in its second reading in the House of Commons. According to its proposers, the Bill reflects

‘a growing consensus that it is time to shift to a longer-term, preventative approach to policymaking. This involves adopting new ways of thinking, planning, and budgeting to ensure that the needs of future generations are respected and taken into account at all levels of government ... (it) is focused on how—by working together—citizens, government, public bodies and business can improve the UK’s environmental, social, economic and cultural wellbeing. The bill aims to embed sustainability and prevention at the heart of Britain’s democratic process as part of transforming how persistent problems—including poverty, inequality, and the climate crisis—are approached and tackled.’

The Bill’s key features include:

- the Government to set measurable national wellbeing objectives and publish an annual report on progress towards meeting them;
- new duties on public bodies, government and certain companies to work, and measure progress, towards designated national wellbeing goals;
- all Ministers to have a specific new duty to promote the future generations principle;
- public bodies to provide future generation and wellbeing impact assessments for proposed changes to policies, taxes and spending;
- creating the post of a UK Future Generations Commissioner, a joint committee on future generations and a regular ‘Futures and forecasting’ report on long term trends;
- systematic engagement with young people and the establishment of citizens and expert panels to advise on wellbeing goals.

See: What Works Wellbeing Centre: <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/>

UK Wellbeing Bill: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/wellbeing-of-future-generations-bill-hl/>

AUSTRALIA

Federal Government Wellbeing Budget initiative

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

See: Chalmers press report and two recent articles:

<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/chalmers-first-budget-will-include-a-chapter-on-wellbeing-20220707-p5azvt>

<https://theconversation.com/australia-is-getting-a-wellbeing-budget-what-we-can-and-cant-learn-from-new-zealand-186725>

<https://theconversation.com/beyond-gdp-jim-chalmers-historic-moment-to-build-a-well-being-economy-for-australia-184318>

ACT Wellbeing Framework

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

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

WADI (Western Australian Development Index)

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

See: Fiona Stanley introduces the WADI: <https://www.andi.org.au/library/>

WADI background:

<https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/department/news/news-article/2020/02/25/a-handly-guide-to-andi>

New South Wales Wellbeing Framework/Budget

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

See: NSW Wellbeing Framework: <https://www.andi.org.au/library/>

Tasmania's Wellbeing framework

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

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

South Australia

In June 2022, the state government launched The Wellbeing Index for South Australia, designed to 'monitor indicators of physical, mental, social/community and Aboriginal cultural wellbeing outcomes for South Australians over time'. The Index is described as 'the first of its kind for South Australia ... and a priority action of our [Strategic Plan](#).' It was developed by the state government agency Wellbeing SA with input from external stakeholders and will be updated annually. Indicators for Aboriginal Cultural Wellbeing are to be developed in 2022-23 in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

See: <https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/evidence-data/wellbeing-index>

ANDI (Australian National Development Index) Limited

ANDI developed from an informal community-research alliance on citizenship and wellbeing set up in 1995. In 2008 the idea of a national wellbeing index with citizen engagement proposed by ANDI was endorsed at the 2008 National Ideas Summit. In 2012, ANDI Limited was incorporated as a not for profit, public interest organisation established to develop a national wellbeing measurement and policy framework, based on research, community engagement and best practice. ANDI's formal and informal partners have included around 40 Australian organisations covering a wide range of fields from health, welfare, human rights and local government to the environment, indigenous issues and children's wellbeing. In the past 25 years, ANDI and its earlier research team have advised and prepared reports for a wide range of Australian and international organisations including the OECD, the UN, the governments of New Zealand, Canada and Bhutan, the Senate, state and local governments in Australia and the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA). From 2018 to 2019, ANDI worked with the University of Melbourne to develop a pilot process for a full national development index focusing on two key domains, education and health (see below). In the past two years the main focus of ANDI's work has been the West Australian Development Index (below) and supporting other projects to promote wellbeing measurement and policymaking in Australia and internationally.

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

WEAll Australia hub

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

See: WEAll Australia: <https://www.neweconomy.org.au/weall-australia/>
 NENA: www.neweconomy.org.au

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

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

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

Centre for Policy Development project: Wellbeing government initiative

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

See: CPD 2022 Project overview: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Impact-Report-Final-with-Hyperlinks-7mb.pdf>
 'Redefining progress' report: <https://cpd.org.au/2022/08/redefining-progress-centre-for-policy-development-wellbeing-initiative/>

University of Canberra: National Conference on Wellbeing and Public Policy

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

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

Appendix: How wellbeing is being built into government

Initiative	Country
Constitutional entrenchment of wellbeing priorities	Ecuador
Legislation for wellbeing as government priority	Wales
National wellbeing policy coordination body	Bhutan
Wellbeing budget rules	Italy
Wellbeing budget framework	New Zealand
National wellbeing performance targets	Scotland
Sustainable Wellbeing Commissioner	Wales
Independent expert report to Legislature	USA (Obama KNI Act)
Local government wellbeing legislation	Australia
National community engagement program	Canada, Australia
Annual community wellbeing survey	Canada, UK ONS
Annual or monthly wellbeing domain reports	Canada, Australia, NZ
University sustainable wellbeing consortium	Italy
School education programs	Wales

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Sources:

Salvaris M. and K. Lycett, 2017. 'New Zealand's wellbeing initiative: building policy leadership on global learning'. Third International Conference on Wellbeing and Public. 5-7 September 2018. Wellington, NZ.
 Durand, M. and C. Exton. 2019. 'Adopting a Well-Being Approach in Central Government: Policy Mechanisms and Practical Tools' OECD. https://s3.amazonaws.com/ghwbpr-2019/UAE/GH19_Ch8.pdf