



## 9.1 The *Australia's welfare* indicator framework

The indicator framework for *Australia's welfare* has three core domains—wellbeing, determinants, and welfare services performance (Figure 9.1.1). Two additional domains—contextual factors, and other factors—recognise the role of other influences, such as access to primary care practitioners, population growth and economic conditions. Each component in the framework represents an area for which it is useful to assess progress and which can inform service improvement.

Data were reported against four of the five domains in *Australia's welfare 2015*, but were not presented for the wellbeing domain pending further conceptual development and scoping. A discussion of the wellbeing domain follows.

This 2017 edition of *Australia's welfare* has 61 indicators, including updated or newly reported results for 39 indicators and first results for 14 new wellbeing indicators. See Table 9.2.2 in Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*' for the complete set of indicators across all domains. More information on definitions and context can be accessed online at [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2017/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2017/related-material).

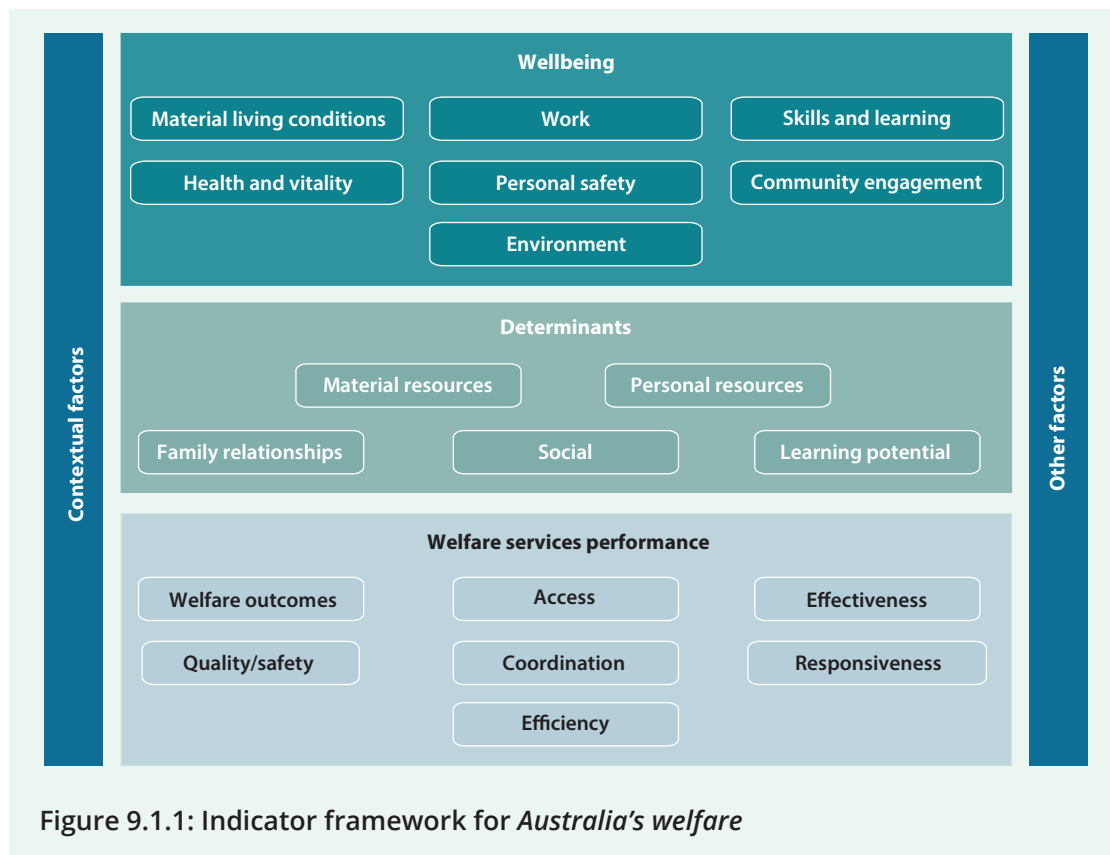


Figure 9.1.1: Indicator framework for *Australia's welfare*





## Developing the wellbeing domain for the indicator framework

As discussed in Chapter 1.3 'Understanding welfare', wellbeing is a complex synthesis of factors that influence happiness or satisfaction with our lives. It can be highly individual and subjective, with different meanings for different people, and can change across the life course. Some people place more importance on financial wealth, others on their physical and/or mental health. In reality, wellbeing is a product of many, often interrelated, factors. Measuring wellbeing at the population level therefore presents a range of challenges. This section presents information on current national and international measurement of wellbeing and introduces the wellbeing indicators selected by the AIHW for the indicator framework shown in Figure 9.1.1.

The measurement of the wellbeing of communities and nations has become increasingly widespread, driven, in part, by a growing recognition that traditional high-level summary economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are, at best, partial measures of a nation's progress. Some studies have shown that countries with higher GDPs are well down the list in rankings, based on subjective wellbeing measures, suggesting that factors other than income can matter for wellbeing (Helliwell et al. 2016).

Several national and international wellbeing indicator sets and frameworks were investigated in developing a wellbeing domain for *Australia's welfare*, and are briefly outlined here. They represent just a small subset of work that is being conducted in this field. Composite indexes of wellbeing are used by some organisations. Others use a set of indicators, without any attempt to aggregate or average results to a single number.

The AIHW's approach to the selection of themes for the wellbeing domain has been to initially map existing national and international frameworks sourced from a desktop review. This draws on the extensive body of research in the area. A strong focus is placed on topics that are relevant to the Australian welfare context and to the *Australia's welfare* report series. In selecting the detailed indicators, the availability of Australian data sources was considered, particularly where the data can be disaggregated sub-nationally, or lend themselves to trend reporting.

### Wellbeing measurement and reporting in Australia

Australia's interest in investigating national wellbeing and progress is reflected in a variety of frameworks and measures that have been developed for the Australian context.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was a frontrunner in this respect. It published *Measures of Australia's progress* every 2–4 years between 2002 and 2013, with the 2013 report reflecting a major revision undertaken during 2011–12. The framework covers four domains—society, economy, environment, and governance—and provides a useful set of indicators to inform conceptual thinking and to show whether life in Australia is getting better (ABS 2013). The ABS also has a framework for social statistics more broadly, which considers individual and societal wellbeing, and the influences and actions that can have an impact on and change the state of wellbeing (ABS 2015a).





Australia's welfare 2017

The first *The Australia we want* report of the Community Council for Australia (2016) presented initial findings on how Australia is performing against a set of measures selected by a group of 60 leaders in the Australian charity and not-for-profit sector. The measures define the Australia that these leaders aspire to live in, and how well we are doing in realising these goals across the nation. The indicators for the reporting framework are grouped into four domains or principles: Just, fair, safe; Inclusive, equal opportunity, united, authentic; Creative, confident, courageous, optimistic; and Generous, kind, compassionate. Results are presented at both the national and state/territory level.

The Department of Social Services (DSS), responsible for national social policy and management of welfare services funded by the Australian Government, uses a conceptual wellbeing framework to guide its policy planning and program development. The framework identifies long-term priorities for improving the lifetime wellbeing of people and families in Australia. It is structured around four wellbeing domains that lend themselves to performance measurement and monitoring—independence, life readiness, family functioning, and strong communities—and two cross-cutting domains of access to opportunity and individual risk factors (DSS 2016).

Several Australian states and territories have also invested in developing wellbeing frameworks to govern planning and policy. See Box 9.1.1 for an example of one state's outcomes framework for welfare services that incorporates wellbeing concepts.

**Box 9.1.1: Human Services Outcomes Framework of the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services**

The New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services has developed a framework based around the question: *What matters for an individual over the course of their life?* It identifies the factors that have an impact on the life course and, particularly, the interconnectedness of these factors. The framework provides a conceptual underpinning and structure for the department's services and outcomes.

The framework has seven domains of wellbeing: home, health, education and skills, economic, safety, social and community, and empowerment. The department explains that its first application of the framework has been to social housing, which:

*'...helps focus our collective effort on using social housing assistance to improve outcomes for tenants and users of our services. It makes transparent the continuum from what we deliver to how people benefit and what outcomes they ultimately achieve...'*

NSW Department of Family & Community Services 2016





A number of wellbeing indexes have also been developed or are under development in Australia. Examples include the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) and the Scanlon Foundation's Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of social cohesion. The ANDI is a composite index, based on a conceptual framework that encompasses 12 social, economic, health and environmental domains, and is described as 'a holistic measure of national progress and wellbeing' (ANDI 2017). The SMI of social cohesion incorporates five domains: belonging, worth, social justice and equity, political participation, and acceptance/rejection. While these domains are not all directly related to wellbeing, indicators touch on many of the themes seen in other wellbeing measures, such as income equality, community participation, trust, and life satisfaction (Markus 2016).

## International wellbeing measurement and reporting

The fifth Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy in 2015 included a strong focus on the measurement of wellbeing. This reflects the topic's current acceptance in mainstream policy discussions at the highest level (OECD 2015a). Three approaches to the measurement of wellbeing are discussed here—an indicator set approach, a subjective measure and an objective measure.

Since 2011, the OECD has been reporting on wellbeing in *How's life? Measuring well-being*. The report documents a wide range of wellbeing outcomes, with comparative and trend data for OECD countries. It is part of the OECD Better Life Initiative, which aims to promote 'better policies for better lives'. The *How's life* framework has three conceptual areas: material conditions, quality of life, and sustainability. Eleven domains—each with a concise set of relevant indicators—capture these conceptual areas: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, work life balance, housing, environmental quality, health status, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, personal security, and subjective wellbeing (OECD 2015b).

Countries can be ranked by indicator but there is no overall summary index. Recent findings show that OECD countries ranking in the top third for GDP per capita—such as Australia, Canada, the United States and Norway, among others—do well overall in terms of material resources, such as income. However, these same countries may have weaknesses in other areas, such as in work-life balance, and housing affordability. This shows that all countries have areas for improvement. Australia does not perform particularly well on some measures, such as employees working long hours, and perceived personal safety. The *How's life* report also notes something that is useful to keep in mind when viewing the indicator data in Chapter 9.2: that different groups within a country's population can have very different wellbeing outcomes (OECD 2015b).

The fifth World Happiness Report was published in 2017, ranking more than 150 countries by their happiness (also referred to as subjective wellbeing) levels, based on a global survey in which participants are asked to rate the quality of their current lives on a scale of 0 to 10. The authors use six key variables—GDP per capita, social support (having someone to count on in times of trouble), healthy life expectancy, social freedom (freedom to make life choices), generosity (donations in the previous month) and perceived absence of corruption—to explain most of the variation in subjective wellbeing between countries. Australia was ranked ninth with Norway the highest ranked. New Zealand, the United States and United Kingdom came in at eighth, fourteenth and nineteenth, respectively (Table 9.1.1) (Helliwell et al. 2017).





The United Nations produces the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a summary measure across the dimensions of: a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being knowledgeable (measured by mean years of schooling), and having a decent standard of living (measured by gross national income per capita). The scores of these three dimensions are aggregated into a composite index. The HDI is reported for up to 188 countries, most recently in 2014. Australia was ranked second, after Norway. The United States, Canada and New Zealand were ranked eighth, ninth and tenth, respectively, and the United Kingdom came in at fourteenth (Table 9.1.1) (United Nations 2016).

On each of the above measures, Australia and similar countries generally perform relatively favourably. There are advantages and disadvantages of each type of measure. It can be hard to obtain a holistic view when multiple indicators are used, however, summary measures can also be difficult to interpret as, in isolation, they provide no underlying information as to the composition of the ranking score. For the wellbeing domain in the *Australia's welfare* indicator framework, as described further in this chapter, AIHW chose to follow an approach similar to that of the OECD's *How's life*, with a small set of key indicators rather than an index or aggregate score. An important purpose of the AIHW's wellbeing indicators is the ability to consider them together with indicators in other parts of the indicator framework. For example, trust, perceptions of safety and life satisfaction can be coupled with social connectedness and volunteering in the determinants domain; and indicators of financial and employment stress in the welfare services performance domain. While international rankings are of interest, they are not the main purpose of the AIHW's wellbeing domain.

**Table 9.1.1: Country ranks for wellbeing summary measures, selected countries and years**

Measure	Year						
		World best	Australia	New Zealand	Canada	United States	United Kingdom
World happiness report <sup>(a)</sup>	2017	Norway	9	8	6	14	19
UN Human Development Index	2014	Norway	2	10	9	8	14

(a) Ranks are based on national average scores when people are asked to evaluate the quality of their lives on a scale of 0 to 10.

Sources: Helliwell et al, 2017; United Nations 2016.

## Themes and indicators for the AIHW wellbeing domain

While there are different views on which measure best represents wellbeing, there is much consensus on what makes us satisfied with our lives, and what is considered human progress (OECD 2015b). There is close alignment across frameworks on such topics as the economy and jobs, education and skills, health, social engagement, personal safety, the environment, and overall life satisfaction or happiness.





As shown in the previous sections on measurement and reporting, wellbeing measures can stand alone; however, in the context of *Australia's welfare*, it is the interrelationships between wellbeing and the other domains of the framework that are of interest. For example, the data should help to assess how the outcomes of welfare service support contribute to achieving and maintaining satisfying and fulfilling lives at the individual, family and community levels. Outcomes measured by indicators in the other domains may influence our wellbeing. In turn, though, our wellbeing will have an impact on our opportunities and choices in life and, to some extent, determine when and how we might interact with the welfare system. The complexity of these interactions means that the placement of indicators within particular domains can be somewhat arbitrary—that is, some indicators could sit just as easily in one domain as another. The AIHW has focused on coverage and completeness of the indicator set as a whole, and encourages readers to view the indicators on the same basis.

The authors' scoping and review resulted in seven themes being selected for the wellbeing domain in the Australia's welfare indicator framework: material living conditions, work, skills and learning, health and vitality, personal safety, community engagement, and environment. Some themes, such as personal relationships, were not included in the wellbeing domain but are represented by indicators in other domains, such as the determinants domain. Fifteen indicators were identified for the wellbeing domain which, together, can meaningfully, usefully and concisely provide a picture of Australia's wellbeing now and into the future (Table 9.1.2). Including a customised wellbeing domain has allowed the AIHW to select the themes, indicators and data for the Australian context, while drawing on global and scientific experience.

The detailed indicators within each theme and indicator area of the wellbeing domain were selected based on standard indicator criteria of relevance, understandability, ability to be actioned/sensitivity to change, feasibility of measurement, and technical robustness. This resulted in 14 indicators being defined. One indicator, for lifelong learning, could not be defined (see Box 9.1.2). As well as this data gap, several gaps remain within other domains of the indicator framework, as set out in the next section.







Table 9.1.2: Indicators for the wellbeing domain

Theme	Indicator number	Indicator summary form	Context
<b>Material living conditions</b>	1	Purchasing power	Measure of national economic wellbeing reflecting real standard of living
	2	Income inequality	Indicator of inequality in the distribution of income in society which is associated with disparities in both health and wellbeing outcomes.
	3	Adequate housing	Indicator of adequate housing which is essential to meet basic needs for shelter, and is a protective factor for health and childhood development.
<b>Work</b>	4	Employment to population ratio	Indicator reflecting a person's resource base as having a job helps protect the household from poverty, and is a major contributor to personal wellbeing.
	5	Employees working 50 or more hours	Measure of [lack of] work-life balance, which reflects complexity of life and residual resources to engage in social interactions.
<b>Skills and learning</b>	6	Non-school qualification	Measure of higher education level which is associated with better material living conditions, better health and greater civic involvement.
	7	Lifelong learning	Indicator of a society that promotes and provides infrastructure for further learning, which is associated with greater wellbeing.
<b>Health and vitality</b>	8	Disability-free life expectancy	Derived measure combining life expectancy with disability prevalence: better reflects aggregate human capacity than life expectancy.
	9	Life satisfaction	Subjective indicator of wellbeing, reflecting the notion that people are their own best judge of their wellbeing. Counterbalances objective measures.
<b>Personal safety</b>	10	Crime victimisation	Measure of safe environment, which is essential to overall mental and physical wellbeing.
	11	Perceptions of safety in the community	Subjective indicator of personal safety, and associated with confidence and social engagement. Counterbalances objective measure.
<b>Community engagement</b>	12	Level of generalised trust	Indicator of, or proxy for, social capital, which is an important contributor to wellbeing directly, and signals other aspects of social participation.
	13	Voter enrolment	Indicator of take-up of basic human right to have a political voice.
<b>Environment</b>	14	Air quality	Indicator of environmental quality. Poor air quality can have a major impact on health, the environment and the economy and can exacerbate conditions such as asthma and other respiratory disorders.
	15	Greenhouse gas emissions	Indicator of environmental sustainability. Increasing greenhouse gas concentrations have an impact on global temperatures and the earth's climate, with consequences for ecosystems and human settlements.





## What is missing from the picture?

Inevitably, there will be some compromise between the ideal set of indicators and those that are reportable in practice. In the *Australia's welfare* indicator framework, data gaps have been kept to a minimum, and proxy indicators have been selected in some instances. Remaining data gaps are outlined in Table 9.1.3 and further explored below.

Table 9.1.3: Data gaps—*Australia's welfare* indicator framework

Domain: sub-domain	Indicator number	Indicator (summary form)	Context	Comment
<b>Wellbeing: Skills and learning</b>	7	Lifelong learning	Indicator of a society that promotes and provides infrastructure for further learning, which is associated with greater wellbeing.	No indicator defined. See Box 9.1.2.
<b>Determinants: Material resources</b>	18	Housing security	Indicator of the ability to maintain tenancy in housing of a satisfactory standard which contributes directly to wellbeing, and reflects adequate financial resources.	No data; no proxy.
<b>Welfare system performance: Welfare outcomes</b>	38	Safe return home for children in out-of-home care	Measure of long-term outcome for children in out-of-home care. For some of these children, the best long term outcome is for them to return home after their parents' skills and capacity to care for them have improved.	No data; no proxy. This indicator could be complemented by an indicator for stable permanent placement.
<b>Welfare system performance: Efficiency; sustainability</b>	43	Cost per service output (by sector)	Cost per unit output is a simple measure of the efficiency of service delivery: the aim is to reduce costs without compromising quality.	Data not reported in 2017 due to interpretation issues around the meaning/desired direction of trends.
	44	Management expense ratio (by sector)	The administrative costs associated with delivering services are a measure of efficiency—and to some extent, indicate sustainability.	No data are available, as, for most programs, the administrative costs are spread over program components, and not separately reportable. While aggregate measures may be possible to compile, they are not readily available.
<b>Welfare system performance: Coordination</b>	50	No indicators identified		







## Housing security

When considering how to develop an indicator for housing security, areas such as housing tenure (for example, home owners, renters), affordability, homelessness, and housing mobility might be considered (AIHW 2010). Information about housing tenure is presented in Indicator 58, affordability in Indicator 30, and homelessness in Indicators 29, 41 and 49 (see Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*').

An indicator on housing mobility could be considered as a proxy for housing security (AIHW 2010). Existing data show that renters are more than 6 times as likely as home owners (with or without a mortgage) to have moved at least 4 times in the last 5 years, and people in private rental accommodation are 2 times as likely as people living in state/territory housing to have moved at least 4 times in the last 5 years (ABS 2009, 2015b).

While this could provide some useful information, not moving from a residence does not mean that the residence is satisfactory; there could be issues with housing condition, overcrowding (see Indicators 3 and 31 in Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*') or personal safety. More work is needed to define this indicator.

## Safe return home for children in out-of-home care

There are no data currently available to report on this indicator. However, work has been undertaken to facilitate future reporting. The AIHW, in consultation with state and territory departments responsible for child protection, has developed indicator specifications for reporting on the number of children who return home, or for whom alternative permanent care arrangements have been provided. A field test was undertaken as part of the 2015–16 National Child Protection data collection. Data are expected to be reported under the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, following an assessment of data availability/quality and subject to approval (AIHW 2016).

## Efficiency indicators: Cost per service output, and Management expense ratio by sector

Data for Indicator 43, Cost per service output, were included in *Australia's welfare* 2015 but have not been reported in this report due to interpretation issues. There is lack of clarity around which components are included in the costs (for example, administrative costs, rebates and subsidies) and therefore what the desired direction of change should be.

Management expense ratios aim to measure administrative costs, such as overheads as a proportion of total program costs, and are a measure of efficiency. The Report on Government Services (RoGS) has several efficiency output indicators in its community sector performance indicators: for example, *Administrative expenditure as a proportion of total recurrent expenditure* (in the disability services sector), *Expenditure per head of target population* (aged care services), *Expenditure per placement* and *Cost per child in out of home care* (child protection services). However, each sector has different measures and, within sectors, there are issues to do with comparing data, due to different policies in states and territories.

Both indicators will be reviewed for future editions. Readers are referred to the RoGS website for further information on efficiency output indicators by sector: <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2016/community-services>.





## Welfare system performance: coordination

This remains a data gap in the framework, but its importance is highlighted in many sectors. For example, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence highlighted the need for better integration of services, including among the justice sector, health services, homelessness services, victim support services, and others (State of Victoria 2016). More work is needed to define 'coordination' and to explore indicators that might measure this concept. This is challenging but measuring and reporting what is important can often lead to increased efforts being directed toward an area.

## Lifelong learning

An indicator for *Lifelong learning* in the Wellbeing domain could not be defined (see Box 9.1.2 for further discussion). Although no single indicator seems to adequately measure the complex and expansive concept of lifelong learning, readers are directed to the results of various indicators in the *Australia's welfare* framework—such as Non-school qualification (Indicator 6), Year 12 attainment (Indicator 28), Work-life balance (Indicator 5), Volunteering (Indicator 25), and Access to the internet (Indicator 26)—for insight into factors that contribute to and reflect aspects of lifelong learning.





### Box 9.1.2: Lifelong learning

As the term implies, lifelong learning occurs throughout the life course. It is learning that goes beyond traditional schooling or formal study and is flexible, diverse and available in different times at different places. Delors (1996) described four pillars of lifelong learning:

- **Learning to know**—mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge
- **Learning to do**—equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future, including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments
- **Learning to live together, and with others**—peacefully resolving conflict; discovering other people and their cultures; fostering community capability; individual competence and capacity; economic resilience; and social inclusion
- **Learning to be**—education contributing to a person's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.

It is unlikely that any one indicator can capture lifelong learning. Canada uses a measure of progress in this area known as the Composite Learning Index (CLI). The CLI is constructed from 15 indicator areas and 26 specific measures.

#### Canada's Composite Learning Index—pillars and indicator areas

**Learning to know**

- Youth literacy skills
- High school dropout rate
- Participation in post-secondary education
- University attainment

**Learning to live together**

- Participation in social clubs and organisations
- Learning for other cultures
- Volunteering

**Learning to do**

- Availability of workplace training
- Participation in job-related training

**Learning to be**

- Exposure to media
- Learning through sports
- Learning through culture
- Access to broadband internet
- Access to learning opportunities
- Social and economic outcomes

*Source: Lifelong Learning Council Queensland Inc. 2016.*

A similar index, the European Lifelong Learning Indicators (ELLI) Index, is constructed from 17 indicators and 36 specific measures organised under the same four pillars as the CLI. It is used to generate a lifelong learning score for European Union member states (Hoskins et al. 2010).





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