

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing measures

Web report | Last updated: 01 Jul 2025 | Topic: [First Nations people](#)

About

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) measures project provides a dedicated focus on First Nations SEWB. The lack of focus on and use of available culturally relevant SEWB measures has hindered progress in understanding and improving First Nations people's wellbeing.

This project is a collaboration between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB Measurement Consortium and the First Nations Health and Welfare Group of AIHW.

Cat. no: IHW 305

- [SEWB measures download material](#)

We acknowledge the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present. We would like to thank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to developing culturally relevant and safe measurement tools that are presented in this project.

- [SEWB is a holistic understanding of First Nations people's health that centres a collective sense of self as defined by connections to body, mind & emotion, family, community, culture, Country, and spirituality](#)
- [This project aims to build understanding of various SEWB measures available, collating 17 culturally derived measures, 2 culturally informed measures, 16 culturally adapted measures](#)
- [Measurement tools based on western concepts of mental health and wellbeing are different to First Nations concepts of SEWB, and are not always culturally appropriate](#)

Summary

Social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is a holistic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people's health that centres a collective sense of self as defined by connections to body, mind & emotion, family, community, culture, Country, and spirituality. Progress in understanding and improving First Nations people's wellbeing is hindered by a lack of focus on and use of, available culturally relevant SEWB measures.

There have been attempts at cultural adaptation of standard instruments for use with First Nations populations, to varying degrees of success, some of which continue to be used. There have also been several new culturally appropriate instruments developed specifically for use with First Nations people, and many of these have been developed by First Nations people and/or in consultation with First Nations communities.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB measures project is a collaboration between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Measurement Consortium and the AIHW's First Nations Health and Welfare Group. The project has researched over 30 SEWB measures, which are grouped into three categories: *culturally derived*, *culturally informed* and *culturally adapted*. There are 17 culturally derived measures, 2 culturally informed measures, and 16 culturally adapted measures.

SEWB measures

Culturally derived

Unique instruments specifically designed for use among First Nations people, for which development was led by or involved First Nations clinical or cultural experts.

Culturally informed

Informed by First Nations worldviews and experience or have sought to centralise and be led by community voices and priorities.

Culturally adapted

Standard instruments initially developed for the general population but have been adapted and evaluated for use with First Nations people.

Information on these SEWB measures have been collated and presented in the following formats:

-  [summary list \[PDF 210kB\]](#)
-  [SEWB measures report \[PDF 650kB\]](#)
-  [SEWB measures inventory \[XLSX 215kB\]](#)

Introduction

Social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is a holistic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people's health that centres a collective sense of self as defined by connections to body, mind & emotion, family, community, culture, Country, and spirituality. SEWB understands this collective sense of self as inherently impacted by context, namely historical, social, cultural, and political determinants.

Improving SEWB is specifically articulated as one of the socio-economic outcome areas in the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). Yet, the lack of focus on and use of available culturally relevant SEWB measures has hindered progress in understanding and improving First Nations people's wellbeing. It is therefore imperative that means of measuring progress in building SEWB in First Nations communities continue to be developed and understood so that programs and services remain fit-for-purpose, and national policies properly reflect First Nations concepts of SEWB.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB measures project

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB measures project originated in the  [first SEWB Gathering](#) in 2021, and was undertaken by the First Nations Health and Welfare Group at the AIHW in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Measurement Consortium (the Consortium). This work endeavours to build understanding of the different types of SEWB measurement tools available by highlighting a range of instruments used for assessing the SEWB of First Nations people.

This project has researched and collated dozens of SEWB measures and resulted in information on over 30 SEWB measures. The purposes of these measurement tools vary and include measures for health-related quality of life, mental health assessments, psychosocial assessments and measures assessing SEWB. The measures are classified under three categories: *culturally derived*, *culturally informed*, and *culturally adapted*. There are 17 culturally derived measures; 2 culturally informed measures; 16 culturally adapted measures.

The project has produced three documents with information on the measures – a summary list, a SEWB measures report and a SEWB measures inventory.

Information about SEWB measures

Summary list

[Summary list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing \(SEWB\) measures - provides an overview of the measures](#)

SEWB measures report

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing measures: SEWB measures report - has details on individual measures](#)

SEWB measures inventory

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing \(SEWB\) measures inventory - allows comparison of measure elements](#)

These products include various information about the measures, for example, purpose, focus population, geography, development, use and validation. The summary list provides an overview of each of the measures. The SEWB measures report contains the details about the measures, focuses on each measure individually. The SEWB measures inventory is an excel file with details about the measures and allows for comparison across the measures and their various elements.

This project and the materials available here, aim to:

- explore practical assessment tools for SEWB
- provide understanding of the range of measurement tools available for different population groups among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- promote the use of tools that are specifically designed for assessing First Nations people where possible
- encourage further development and/or refinement of culturally appropriate tools to assess First Nations people's SEWB
- provide understanding of the limitations of standard tools when used to assess First Nations people.

Background

In Australia, measuring First Nations people's SEWB has mostly happened through the use of standard instruments developed for the general population. These instruments are based on concepts of mental health and wellbeing that are different to First Nations concepts of SEWB. Such instruments are not always considered culturally appropriate for use with First Nations people if they have not been culturally adapted.

Over the years, there have been attempts at cultural adaptation of standard instruments for use with First Nations populations, to varying degrees of success. Some of these adapted instruments have been and continue to be used. There have also been several new culturally appropriate instruments developed specifically for use with First Nations people to measure SEWB. Many of these instruments have been developed by First Nations people and/or in consultation with First Nations communities.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Gathering

In March 2021 the  [first SEWB Gathering](#) took place in Perth with First Nations peak bodies, community organisations, leaders, experts, and front-line workers. The aim was to create a national SEWB blueprint for the future. Five recommendations were agreed to in that first SEWB Gathering:

1. To have regular SEWB Gatherings.
2. Gaya Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (GDPSA) to renew and implement the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023.
3. Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHB) and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to establish a SEWB Network and Clearing House.
4. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consortium will be established to develop SEWB measurements. This measurement consortium will be hosted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The principle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Governance must inform this work at every level.
5. A healing consortium to lead advocacy for healing (strong spirit) models and centres across the country.

As a result of the fourth recommendation and to drive progress in SEWB measurement, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Measurement Consortium was established in 2021. It is supported by the AIHW.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Measurement Consortium

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Measurement Consortium (the Consortium) was established to identify culturally appropriate wellbeing measures to evaluate what works and what does not work to improve SEWB, inform patient and clinical decision making, service delivery, policy, and ultimately improve patient outcomes. Its priorities include reviewing SEWB assessments and national mental health surveys, protecting cultural knowledge, improving Government understanding of SEWB data collection and interpretation, outcome measures and KPIs.

The Consortium has reviewed ABS surveys and adapted or developed measurement tools, offered governance advice on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing's First Nations Mental Health Prevalence Study, and agreed to undertake a program/policy scoping of national progress in the SEWB sector.

Consortium membership

The Consortium was chaired by Professor Pat Dudgeon (Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHWB)/University of Western Australia) from its inception in 2021 to February 2023, when Professor Gail Garvey (University of Queensland) took over as Chair. The Consortium members are primarily First Nations people, who have expertise in SEWB and mental health research and policy, as well as measurement in these areas.

The Consortium has representation from First Nations organisations and universities across the country, with the following members to June 2025:

- Prof. Gail Garvey (Chair) – School of Public Health, University of Queensland
- Prof. Pat Dudgeon – TIMHWB/University of Western Australia
- Prof. Helen Milroy – Perth's Children's Hospital/University of Western Australia
- Dr. Graham Gee – Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne; Intergenerational Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital
- Dr. Stewart Sutherland – Australian National University
- Mr. Rob McPhee – Danila Dilba Health Service
- Prof. Maree Toombs – University of New South Wales
- Ms. Rachel Fishlock – Gaya Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia
- Ms. Danielle Dyll – National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- Prof. Roz Walker – Ngangk Yira Institute for Change, Murdoch University
- Dr. Fadwa Al-Yaman – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The First Nation's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit provided secretariat support for the Consortium, as well as research and project assistance.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB measures

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB measures project was undertaken by the First Nations Health and Welfare Group at the AIHW in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB Measurement Consortium. This work endeavours to build understanding of the different types of SEWB measurement tools available by highlighting a range of instruments used for assessing the SEWB of First Nations people.

This project has researched and collated dozens of SEWB measures and resulted in information on over 30 SEWB measures contained in the following material available on [SEWB measures download material](#):

- SEWB measures summary list
- SEWB measures inventory
- SEWB measures report.

These products include information about the purpose, focus population, measure type and format, geography, development, adaptation, use, initial study and validation, as well as other details (where available) of these measures. The summary list provides an overview of each of the measures. The SEWB measures inventory is an excel file with details about the measures and allows for comparison across the measures and their various elements. The SEWB measures report contains the same details as the inventory, but focuses on each measure individually. The information available on measures varies; greater detail is available for some measures than others, as some measures are used more regularly and others infrequently or in a limited capacity; some measures have been adapted or developed many years ago, while others may still be in the process of adaptation or development.

The purposes of these measurement tools vary, ranging from measures for health-related quality of life, to mental health assessments, to psychosocial assessments and measures assessing SEWB. This project and the materials available here, aim to:

- explore practical assessment tools for SEWB
- provide understanding of the range of measurement tools available for different population groups among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- promote the use of tools that are specifically designed for assessing First Nations people where possible
- encourage further development and/or refinement of culturally appropriate tools to assess First Nations people's SEWB
- provide understanding of the limitations of standard tools when used to assess First Nations people.

The measures are classified under three categories based as determined by the Consortium: *culturally derived*, *culturally informed*, and *culturally adapted*. The project materials include: 17 culturally derived measures; 2 culturally informed measures; 16 culturally adapted measures.

Culturally derived measures

Culturally derived tools are unique instruments specifically designed for use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for which development was led by or involved First Nations clinical or cultural experts in the study and the tools were validated for use with First Nations people. Many culturally derived tools target specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, for example:

- Aboriginal Resilience and Recovery Questionnaire (ARRQ) – adults; designed to assess a range of personal, relationship, community and cultural strengths and resources found to be associated with resilience, healing, and recovery from trauma.
- First Nations Child Quality of Life (FirstNations-CQoL) – parents of children aged 0–12; developed to assess three domains of First Nations children's wellbeing from the perspective of their parents and carers.
- Good Spirit Good Life Assessment – adults aged 45 and over; designed to assess quality of life for older Aboriginal Australians with and without cognitive impairment.
- Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist (WASC-Y) – young people aged 13–17; a self-report symptom checklist that aims to identify young Aboriginal people who are at risk of anxiety, depression and/or suicidal behaviours.
- What Matters 2 Adults (WM2Adults) – adults; aims to generate a preference-based wellbeing measure underpinned by the values and preferences of First Nations adults.

Culturally informed measures

Culturally informed measures are those that have been informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews and experience or have sought to centralise and be led by community voices and priorities. For example:

- Racial Identity and Self- Esteem of Children (IRISE_C) – an inventory developed to explore the elements of racial identity and self-esteem of urban, rural, and regional Aboriginal children aged 8–12.

Culturally adapted measures

Culturally adapted tools are standard instruments initially developed for the general population but have been adapted and evaluated for use with First Nations people (to varying degrees). For example:

- Australian Aboriginal Version of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (AAVHTQ) – culturally responsive adaptation for Aboriginal people that measures specific traumatic stressors and trauma symptoms; includes specific cultural idioms of distress reactions relevant to First Nations people.
- Kimberley Mum's Mood Scale (KMMS) – uses a culturally secure approach to screening for depression and anxiety during the perinatal period for First Nations women.
- Modified Kessler Scale (MK-K5) – adapted from original tool to determine psychological status of First Nations peoples; it was developed in consultation with First Nations stakeholders for use in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey.
- Pearlin Mastery Scale – measures personal control and mastery; cross-cultural adaptation with translation and back translation was conducted, and mastery was inversely correlated with measures of perceived stress and positively correlated with health behaviours.

- Supportive Care Needs Assessment Tool for Indigenous Patients (SCNAT- IP) – adapted to serve as an assessment tool for First Nations people with cancer.[SEWB measures download material](#)
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SEWB measures download material

Summary list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) measures

Resource

PDF 210kB

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing measures: SEWB measures report

Resource

PDF 651kB

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) measures inventory

Resource

XLSX 214kB

Related material

Related topics

- [First Nations people](#)