

Volunteering, Wellbeing and Wellbeing Budgets

- *We support the Australian Treasurer’s aspirations for wellbeing indicators and a Wellbeing Budget that can better reflect what people value.*
- *Australians value volunteering and the wellbeing benefits it brings to individuals, communities, and the nation.*
- *Volunteering should be included in wellbeing frameworks and budgets.*

Background

The Australian Treasurer has indicated that future Federal Budgets will include wellbeing metrics.

Wellbeing Budgets measure progress on a broader range of measures than the more traditional fiscal and economic considerations. Wellbeing Budgets are typically underpinned by Wellbeing Frameworks or Living Standards Frameworks.

The Australian Treasury has been looking to New Zealand to learn from their Wellbeing Budgets¹. Budget 2022 was the fourth Wellbeing Budget in New Zealand. The refreshed Living Standards Framework² that underpins the Budget includes indicators and measures relating to volunteering, under the ‘Work, care and volunteering’ domain.

Volunteering and wellbeing

Wellbeing is a concept with multiple definitions and different individuals, groups and cultures understand wellbeing in different ways.

Different approaches to understanding and measuring wellbeing typically include individual and collective elements, and the individual and collective can interrelate in a range of ways and reinforce each other.

In this briefing, we highlight how volunteering interrelates with wellbeing at the individual, community, and national levels.

Volunteering and individual wellbeing: Volunteering promotes individual wellbeing through offering a sense of purpose and opportunities for social connection³. Volunteering can promote physical and mental health and support an individual’s connection to place.

Volunteering and community wellbeing: Volunteering promotes community wellbeing through building social capital (the networks and relationships between people). Volunteers are part of the social fabric of communities, and participation in volunteering is an indicator of social cohesion and the wider health of civil society.

¹ <https://budget.govt.nz/budget/2022/wellbeing/outlook/index.htm>

² <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-10/tp-living-standards-framework-2021.pdf>

³ See Volunteering Australia’s [Evidence Insights](#) on Volunteering and mental health

Volunteering and the nation's wellbeing: Volunteering contributes to progress on many national priorities, including tackling mental health issues, reducing social isolation, responding to crises (such as national disasters and health emergencies), and addressing climate change.

Current policy frameworks

Many existing and emerging policy and budgetary frameworks already incorporate a focus on wellbeing. For example, these exist at the international, national, and State and Territory levels. Typically, these frameworks include recognition of the role of volunteering in promoting wellbeing or identify volunteering as an indicator of wellbeing.

International: A recent Centre for Policy Development report⁴ explores 21 global approaches to wellbeing. The report highlights how many governments – ‘from Wales to Ecuador; Bhutan to New Zealand^{5,6} – have embarked on a wellbeing journey, with countries varying in the path followed and how far they have come so far.

National: The Australian Treasurer has indicated the Federal government will progress a wellbeing approach. There are existing frameworks and strategies to build upon. For example, the following strategies have a wellbeing focus:

- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy⁷
- National Preventative Health Strategy⁸

State and Territory: In Australia, several States and Territories have progressed or are exploring wellbeing approaches. For example:

- The ACT Government has a wellbeing framework⁹ which underpinned the 2021-22 Budget process and is intended to shape other decision-making processes of government.
- The Tasmanian Government is in the process of developing the State's first Wellbeing Framework, with a discussion paper to be released later in 2022. The Tasmanian Government has already developed the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework¹⁰.
- In NSW, there is a specific wellbeing Framework for schools¹¹. There is also a pilot program¹² on a wellbeing framework and budget for the NSW Government.

⁴ <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CPD-Redefining-Progress-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://theconversation.com/australias-wellbeing-budget-what-we-can-and-cant-learn-from-nz-186725>

⁶ <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/practice-examples/towards-a-wellbeing-budget-examples-from-canada-and-new-zealand/>

⁷ <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/projects/childrens-strategy/childrens-mental-health-wellbeing-strategy>

⁸ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030>

⁹ https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1498198/ACT-wellbeing-framework.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5549/1-Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf

¹¹ <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/whole-school-approach/wellbeing-framework-for-schools>

¹² <https://www.neweconomy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/A-wellbeing-budget-for-NSW-Foundation-paper-for-public-release.pdf>

Next steps

Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies are collectively advocating for the inclusion of volunteering in wellbeing frameworks and budgets. As wellbeing approaches are developed further, we urge governments to engage with the volunteering peak bodies and the wider ecosystem.

It should be noted that the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics is the only official data source which consistently provides information on volunteers and volunteering using a sample of the general population. The GSS is currently being reviewed and the last data enumerated was in 2020. This data generated from the GSS is vital to the volunteering ecosystem and is extensively used within Australia and internationally. As governments move to wellbeing frameworks and Budgets, it becomes all the more important that robust official data on volunteering is available.

About us

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. We work collaboratively with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies, who are our foundation members.

Useful further information

- Wellbeing approaches are similar to, and build upon, other initiatives that seek to look beyond GDP as the key measure of progress. One example is the Centre of Social Impact's Social Progress Index¹³.
- Wellbeing approaches' and 'wellbeing economies' refer to a wide spectrum of approaches within government and policymaking. The Centre for Policy Development's Wellbeing Initiative suggests that what they have in common is the following features:
 - Holistic: Overall wellbeing has many contributing factors, and wellbeing approaches employ systems thinking, aiming to break down thematic or administrative silos and work towards intersectional opportunities to increase wellbeing.
 - Long-term: Wellbeing is not just about short-term happiness. Policies, initiatives and approaches to raise wellbeing typically take a long time to implement and a long time to work. Wellbeing approaches look beyond election cycles to the kinds of outcomes that can only be achieved with sustained, long-term commitment.
 - Future focused: Wellbeing approaches are concerned not just with current generations, but also with future generations. They often involve a significant component of planning for the future and have an emphasis on sustainability and environmental protection.
- Australia's Treasury introduced its own wellbeing framework for internal use in 2004.
<https://treasury.gov.au/publication/economic-roundup-winter-2004/policy-advice-and-treasurys-wellbeing-framework>

¹³ <https://amplify.csi.edu.au/social-progress-index/>