

Submission to Treasury

Measuring What Matters

January 2023

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Introduction

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the Treasury for the opportunity to comment on the development of indicators for the wellbeing budget approach.

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health and one of the largest across the Queensland government. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all classifications of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce including registered nurses (RN), midwives, nurse practitioners (NP) enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our close to 70,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from students and early career clinicians to senior management. The vast majority of nurses and midwives in Queensland are members of the QNMU. As the Queensland state branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the QNMU is the peak professional body for nurses and midwives in Queensland.

Through our submissions and other initiatives, the QNMU expresses our commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve health equity and ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are heard. The QNMU supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the call for a First Nations Voice enshrined in our Constitution. The QNMU acknowledges the lands on which we work and meet always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

The following recommendations, arising from the following presentation, are provided here to inform consideration of the QNMU submission.

Recommendations

The QNMU recommends that:

As a part of the progression of the Wellbeing budget, Australia join the international Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) Group, this providing experience and debate around Australia's implementation of a Wellbeing Budget Framework.

Treasury consider the model developed by QNMU, in particular the positioning of the recognised social determinants of health as overarching goals around which wellbeing indicators can be developed.

That Treasury consider the QNMU's suggestions regarding the need for a broad and ongoing consultation framework for the development and management of a wellbeing indicator dashboard.

That the QNMU suggestion that an independent group be established (as in other WEGo countries) to lead the wellbeing management process be considered.

That the QNMU's offer to participate in the ongoing consultation process be considered.

Comments on the wellbeing budget

The QNMU applauds the Treasurer on the introduction of the new "Wellbeing Budget". In providing comment on this initiative we also would like to express our strong interest in involvement in the subsequent consultation process for the development of the final Wellbeing Dashboard of measurable indicators that will support Australia's progress under this approach.

While there are critics who argue for a focus on key economic indicators such as GDP, a measure of market activity, these indicators are frequently questioned for their dominant, but narrow, position in economic debates. As Stiglitz (2020) commented, regarding the situation in the US during the pandemic: "In sum, the relentless drive to maximize short-term GDP worsened health care, caused financial and physical insecurity, and reduced economic stability and resilience, leaving Americans more vulnerable to shocks than the citizens of other countries".

A wellbeing approach to economic management is one increasingly introduced internationally. The Wellbeing Economy Governments group (WEGo) was launched in 2018, at an OECD World Forum in South Korea (Scottish Government, 2023). The group enables cross-government engagement, learning and collaboration to utilise the advice of experts and deepen understanding of delivering a wellbeing economy for citizens and environment. Membership of this group would provide Australia with rich interactions and learnings as it moves forward to the development and implementation of our wellbeing approach.

The budget focus on wellbeing has the capacity through targeted initiatives to address the needs of disadvantaged groups within our society, including working women and families struggling under the current economic pressures. This focus is particularly important to deliver some of the elements of social change that our new government is progressing, with a first, very welcome step, being the promised referendum on the Indigenous Voice – a long due but important change that will contribute to progressing Australia as a decent civil society. Associated with this shift are the very positive IR reform changes that will contribute to overall wellbeing in Australia. Increased bargaining power will contribute to long term job security for workers, making some contribution to their capacity to manage the effects of the current cost of living crisis.

The QNMU has a very strong involvement in the broader health area. From our long experience we have developed a strong appreciation of the complexity of our sector, of the critical interconnectedness of the broad factors impacting people's health and in particular the strong interrelationship between good working conditions and the quality of health outcomes delivered to the public in our hospitals, our health centres, and our nursing homes. Our active engagement reflects the achievement of one of QNMU's four ambitions – to improve community health outcomes by addressing the social determinants of health through the actions of nurses and midwives.

Our very active and constructive role in the health sector in Australia includes working in association with for example nurses and midwives' branches across other states as well as the National Body, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) to make an active input to policy development and practice. For example, in the last year the QNMU made 52 individual submissions as well as an additional 23 in association with the ANMF. Given our holistic approach to health, our engagement in policy development is equally broad with our submissions including the Work and Care agenda, Closing the Gap, National School Reform, Information Privacy, and the Medical Benefits Scheme review as well as broad input on legislative changes. This involvement reflects the broad vision of the QNMU in actively contributing to a more effective healthcare sector for all Australians and has a strong alignment with a wellbeing objective.

This role also includes an engagement in the progression of broader health policy initiatives. For example, the QNMU is currently working in collaboration with the Queensland Government, and Queensland Health, to progress a 2020 election commitment - the development of a nursing and midwifery report card that reflects the QNMU's Positive Practice Environment (PPE) Standards for Nursing and Midwifery (2020). The link between PPE standards and positive health care outcomes for patients is well recognised internationally. Past campaigns by the union have targeted an increased recognition and application of evidence-based data to support health care decisions (for example, our recent "Count the babies" campaign targets developing evidence to ensure that all babies have a safe start in life by counting babies in midwifery workload design, allocation, skill mix or ratios).

The QNMU's membership extends across operational health practice in Queensland, including a wide range of First Nations members, members within the private and public sector, in Nursing Homes and across regional, rural and remote Queensland. This diversity of membership underpins our capacity to maintain a strong awareness of practice and also to contribute to the delivery of quality practice for the community. From our position we provide an invaluable link between policy direction and practical delivery, critical to good policy development and delivery of on the ground outcomes.

Developing the wellbeing dashboard

As Stiglitz (2020) recommends, "each nation needs a dashboard – a set of numbers that would convey essential diagnostics of its society and economy and help steer them". Clearly, the forthcoming debate will be around the framing of Australia's Wellbeing Approach, and what are the indicators that should be defined to drive it. A starting point for this will be the 32 OECD Indicators with detailed assessments provided by Treasury to support this process. However, given the wide-ranging impacts of these decisions we see this consultation step as a first step in the development of Australia's Wellbeing Dashboard, with our comments, summarized below, provided against that context.

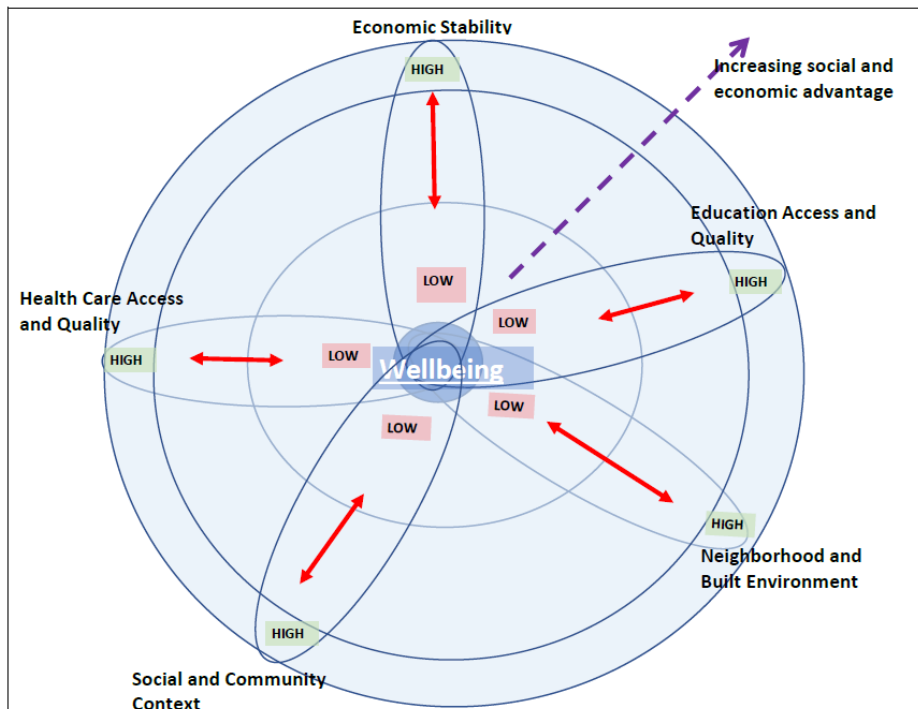
- An overall model of how we see the design of indicators, framed around the 5 social determinants of Health:
 - Economic Stability.
 - Education Access and Quality.
 - Health Care Access and Quality.
 - Neighbourhood and Built Environment.
 - Social and Community Context.

With suggestions on:

- the broad inclusion of indicators to measure these determinants.
- the process for next consultation step starting with agreement on "what wellbeing means".
- the process of ongoing design, data collection and evaluation.

We agree that a relatively small number of indicators is required and that all final indicators satisfy the requirement of measurability, reliability and understandability – and thus are credible and relatable to the public. These indicators should provide coverage of the scope of wellbeing and also be reflective of change, to support the ongoing progression on this objective.

Our perspective of a wellbeing model is summarised in the model below:



Note: The dashed arrow indicates direction of progress from low to high success

From the model (noting Australia/OECD ratings are provided after relevant indicators):

- It is argued that the 5 social determinants of health (reflecting the broad needs for achieving a person’s potential for health and wellbeing) provide an appropriate framework against which to define indicators for the dashboard.
- Ideally all indicators would fit in the outer ring of the model – thus reflecting successfully achieved wellbeing characteristics – for example, as noted in the OECD framework indicators, Australia rates highly on the Economic Stability for “Household wealth” (2/29), “Housing affordability” (11/35) “Labour underutilisation” (28/34) and “Household debt” (30/34) providing indicators of differing levels of success.
- Against each Determinant, several indicators will be needed to scope that determinant – for example, clearly Economic Stability cannot be defined by a single indicator, with factors such as “Household wealth” (2/29) and “Household debt” (30/34) adding further breadth.
- Indicator range is needed to show the scope of each determinant for a Wellbeing society – thus ranging from a “Low” to “High” position. E.g., “Social interactions” (4/24) to “Gender gap in feeling safe” (37/37).
- Indicators also need to demonstrate sensitivity to change – thus an indicator such as “Voter turnout” (1/38), is not as useful to Australia’s Dashboard, given that voting in Australia is compulsory, with “Trust in government” (16/38) potentially more useful.

Initial suggestions on what these indicators might include are provided below with the QNMU's comments.

Indicators by Domain	Rank ¹	QNMU's Comments
Economic Stability		
Household wealth	2/29	While limited time series this highlights income disparities
Housing affordability	11/35	Marked variation over time shown
S80/S20 income share ratio	24/37	A high-level society indicator of the share of income
Labour underutilization rate	28/34	
Household debt	30/34	
Long hours in paid work	30/36	This is showing an improvement but a useful one to watch
Education access and quality		
School entry disparity – eg NAPLAN grade 3		Eg % above minimum reading standard
Educational attainments among young adults	13/37	
Completion year 12/ tertiary entry?		
Healthcare access and quality		
Life expectancy at birth	5/38	
Premature mortality	11/38	
Neighbourhood and built environment (4-38)		
Exposure outdoor air pollution	4/38	
Life satisfaction	18/33	Relatively high but declining – so useful
Homicides	22/38	May not be optimal crime indicator
Red list of threatened species	30/38	These 3 indicators all giving an interrelated picture thus potentially not all required
Material footprint – materials extracted	36/38	
Greenhouse gas emissions	38/38	
Social and community context / Political		
Social interactions	4/24	
Trust in Government	16/38	
Social support	19/38	
Collective engagement ²		This could be reflected in union membership levels reflecting the personal agency in addressing work conditions.
Gender parity in politics	20/38	
Gender wage gap	23/38	
Gender gap in feeling safe	37/37	
Racism		Some indicator needed

¹Rank – Numbers indicate the Australia/OECD/Australian – where available –from the Treasury documentation on the OECD indicators

² The profile of union membership is changing markedly, with the highest proportions of members seen in Unions associated in areas such as health and education workers.

While the call for comments asks respondents to identify and provide well researched indicators that satisfy the Treasury criteria, it was not felt appropriate to formally define these at this stage in the consultation process. The final Australian wellbeing dashboard must reflect the views of Australians, and Australians will need to take ownership of this process for it to be effective. Thus, these suggestions are offered as a part of the process of preparing for a more detailed discussion on this issue.

The next step

The adoption of a Wellbeing approach represents a major shift in Australia's budgetary landscape. To develop an approach through which this new approach can be progressed it is felt that a step back is needed, moving thinking from the more standard economic perspective, for example around a GDP indicator, forward to one taking into account broader wellbeing perspectives. The decisions being taken now will frame economic decisions actions and outcomes in Australia for some time and thus need to be inclusive rigorous and highly strategic.

As a part of this reflection process some of the serious questions which need to be asked might include:

- What are peoples' aspirations for a future Australia?
- What do we, as Australians, mean by wellbeing?
- What are the dimensions of wellbeing?
- What indicators could reflect the scope of each dimension?
- How can these be measured and assessed, and what cannot be measured, but needs to be considered?
- How will ongoing evaluation process be managed?
- How will the wellbeing approach be sustained?
- What are the funding implications of the process (thus maximizing returns and minimizing the costs)?
- What are the implications of not doing anything? This is a critical question to formally consider, as answers will inform the design of the process, but also will be critical in the engagement process.
- How can we incentivize funding decisions that will enhance the wellbeing of society and thus this process?
- For successful implementation, how can the essential collaboration, and joint operations across the traditionally siloed government, occur?

Ongoing data collection, analysis and evaluation

Associated with the decision process on indicators would be essential input on the practicality of each indicator. Given the uniqueness of this approach, and the

significant economic implications, it would seem appropriate that an independent group be established to inform the design and manage the ongoing process.

One approach suggested by the Centre for Policy Development (Gaukroger and Trebeck, 2022), which has merit, is the establishment of an independent dedicated office to review practices in relation to wellbeing outcomes. A position such as an Evaluator General could provide valuable leadership across the public sector, providing coordinated leadership across government in the progression the wellbeing agenda with the capacity for a focus on greater alignment of government actions contributing to desired outcomes. This role could also take the lead in the coordination of ongoing consultation within government across the community. A final important role would be the regular evaluation and reporting roles. The ongoing evaluation process, led by the Evaluator General, could also, for annual reporting, align with an agency such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This approach would seem to align with the approach adopted by New Zealand (Wellbeing Economic Alliance, 2021) which has included the breaking down of agency silos in its key design features. With the adoption of such a significant shift in approach, managing this through an established central agency such as Treasury may constrain the capacity to adopt a new way of thinking.

Such a group, with the capacity to access expertise across government and other key stakeholder groups, would need to establish a framework for the ongoing progression of this approach. Obviously there would be key links with Treasury around formal budget development and reporting but this group should also have the capacity for managing Australia's wellbeing perspective within the broader economy.

It is also essential that in the ongoing process there is an iterative loop that includes reporting, evaluation and review processes. While it is desirable that the initial establishment of the wellbeing dashboard provides the ongoing suite of indicators, it is also inevitable that some refinements will be needed over time, whether in refinement of data collection and analysis processes or, at the extreme, some change in the total suite of indicators included.

Incentive government programs

Finally, there may be a significant opportunity to be considered in the implementation of the wellbeing approach through a harnessing of some of the funding provided by the Government by a clear focus on key identified priorities identified through public consultation. In the New Zealand situation, they have identified for example 2020 Wellbeing goals (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2021):

- Just transition.
- Future of work.
- Maori and Pacific.
- Child wellbeing.

- Physical and mental wellbeing.

which then provides directions for change.

This would seem an opportunity for Australia to identify our priorities through the consultation process, and to include these in informing government decisions. Such actions could also be included in major national research funding approaches, such as the National Health and Medical Research Council, where the identification of funding priorities is defined, often from the assessment of burden of disease assessments (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022). Given the significance of such research, this may provide an additional avenue through which national priorities can be more effectively achieved.

Ongoing consultation process

While the current call for consultation suggests that input is sought on possible indicators to then be developed by Treasury, as indicated in the above discussion a more inclusive consultation process seems essential if real and sustainable input is to be received. Further for the ongoing management of a wellbeing framework that drives Australia's economic direction, such a broad consultation process would seem to be an essential element.

In recognising the significant potential that the wellbeing approach has to deliver positive change to our society and economy, the QNMU would like to offer our engagement in further of consultation in refining the structure of the wellbeing dashboard, and in further discussions if appropriate.

With our long history of active and practical engagement with Governments and other key stakeholders in this area, the QNMU is well positioned to provide a valuable practical link between the operational approaches to achieving strategic outcomes

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