

# Measuring What Matters: Consultation Feedback

## Meeting details

**Meeting host name/ organisation:** The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use - Youth Advisory Boards

**Meeting host contact details:** Kate Ross, Kate.ross@sydney.edu.au

### Meeting host

- ☐ Member of Parliament
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ Non-government organisation
- ☐ Business
- ☒ Academic
- ☐ Community group
- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Other

**Meeting date:** 8/05/2023

**Meeting location:** Zoom

### Participants attending:

- ☐ Member of a community organisation
- ☐ Businesses
- ☒ Academics
- ☐ Union members
- ☐ Individuals

☒ Other **Members of Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, PREMISE NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence and Australia's Mental Health Think Tank Youth Advisory Boards**

**Number of participants:** 8

## What matters to Australians?

1. Did the five emerging policy themes Prosperous, Inclusive, Sustainable, Cohesive and Healthy resonate with meeting participants?

☒ Yes ☐ No

2. Which of the following themes are most important to you? (Select three)

☒ **Prosperous:**

*A growing, productive and resilient economy*

☐ **Inclusive:**

*A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate*

☐ **Sustainable:**

*A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations*

☒ **Cohesive:**

*A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation*

☒ **Healthy:**

*A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future*

3. Which themes or descriptions were most frequently discussed? (Select three)

☐ **Prosperous:**

*A growing, productive and resilient economy*

☒ **Inclusive:**

*A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate*

☐ **Sustainable:**

*A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations*

☒ **Cohesive:**

*A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation*

☒ **Healthy:**

*A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future*

#### 4. What do you see as the most important issues for future wellbeing? Are these captured by the emerging policy themes?

Protecting the mental and physical health of young people are critically important issues for the future wellbeing of the nation.

Involving young people in mental health and wellbeing policy is a right (UNHCR 1989) and an economic imperative, yet there is currently no democratic mechanism for youth input on wellbeing policy. Given that the onset of mental health problems typically occurs in adolescence, the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use recognizes the importance of involving young people in research and policy. Previous evaluations of our approach to working with young people have found that involving young people as advisors enhances the quality and appropriateness of youth-related research, improves dissemination messages and implementation strategies, and increases youth understanding of materials/measures used (Prior et al 2022).

Reflecting the Matilda Centre's commitment to working in partnership with young people to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes, we worked with six young people (age 16-24) who are part of our existing Youth Advisory Boards to contribute to the second phase of the Measuring What Matters Consultation via a series of online consultations with our team. These Youth Advisors (YA's) welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the second phase of the Measuring What Matters Consultation.

The YA's resonated with the five emerging policy themes, sharing that each of the themes "summarise important issues that need to be addressed" to improve societal wellbeing. One YA stated that while *Cohesive* and *Inclusive* are important and expected, they sound like "business terms" and suggested adopting different names that "resonate with people more". Overall, the YA's agreed that important wellbeing issues were captured by the emerging policy themes. The following factors were specifically discussed as critical to the wellbeing of young people; safety, healthy relationships, community engagement, protecting vulnerable populations and financial wellbeing. Other important issues for wellbeing identified by YA's not captured by the five policy themes included:

- Belonging, described as living in a society that fosters mutual respect and caring relationships, and does not tolerate discrimination or violence – is important for supporting wellbeing and inclusivity.
- Supporting mental health, as this has downstream benefits for productivity and economic growth.

Additionally, the YA's noted that it is important to explore the overlap and intersection between themes and consequences (e.g., building a resilient economy may have environmental costs, cost of living crises may prohibit community participation), citing the following examples;

- **Healthy**: when people are physically and mentally healthy, they can contribute to a prosperous society and economy.
- **Sustainable**: protecting the environment is important for collective wellbeing, particularly as young people are disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- **Prosperous**: a resilient, sustainable economy can lead to secondary benefits, such as greater access to services, education, infrastructure, and better mental health.

- **Inclusive**: an inclusive society that equally shares opportunities is also a more cohesive society.
- **Cohesive**: societal participation and active engagement (e.g., creative activities, culture) contributes to wellbeing.

Critically, the YA's strongly recommend that mental health should be considered as a cross-cutting issue across each theme and should be considered and measured within each accordingly. More information should be provided to understand how the proposed policy themes will be targeted, implemented, and measured.

Finally, there was a call for youth participation, including opportunities to engage diverse and representative youth in decision-making and evaluation processes under a wellbeing agenda. Young people are uniquely placed, and committed to shaping solutions to improve youth wellbeing and they should have a voice in developing wellbeing policies across portfolios. We welcome the recent establishment of a Federal Youth Engagement Model and see a critical place for Youth Steering Committees to contribute to the develop and monitoring of the Wellbeing Framework

In 2022 the Matilda Centre and our Youth Advisory Board put out a survey asking young Australians aged 16-25 for their views on the most important priorities for youth mental health prevention research and policy. A diverse group of over 800 young Australians answered the call signalling that young people are passionate about contributing improving youth mental health (Ross and Houston et al., 2023). Many of the issues identified in this Measuring What Matters consultation with our YA's are reflected in our findings from this survey. For example, nearly all survey participants (98.4%) agreed that young people should be involved in setting mental health and substance use prevention research and policy agenda (Ross and Houston et al., 2023). When asked about issues relevant to young people's mental health, the most important issues identified were; isolation and social disconnectedness, unhealthy relationships, climate change and intergenerational trauma. Additionally, there were strong calls among survey participants for increased mental health support through subsidised counselling, more mental health resources and improving school support, as well as calls for increased generalised financial support.

Ross, K., Houston, J., Barrett, E., Duong, F., The Matilda Centre YAB, Birrell, L., Bower, M., Conroy, C., Grager, A., Grummitt, L., Prior, K., Rowlinson, K., L., Teesson, M., Chapman, C. (2023) Online survey of young Australians to understand youth priorities for mental health and substance use prevention research (manuscript in preparation)

## 5. How might the descriptions be amended to best reflect our priorities?

The YA's involved in this consultation found that the descriptions were understandable and broad. However, they suggest that they could be improved to better reflect key priority issues such as housing affordability as well as a more diverse range of populations. The following changes were recommended;

- Under the policy theme "*Prosperous*," add a descriptor relating to people having access to secure, affordable housing.
- Under "*Inclusive*," add a descriptor relating to a society that does not tolerate discrimination, bigotry, violence or hate speech.

- Under “*Sustainable*,” include a descriptor acknowledging First Nations knowledge in addressing climate change. Additionally, the YA’s noted the importance of civic participation in building sustainable communities.
- Under “*Cohesive*,” add a descriptor relating to a society that values First Nations culture and supports Social and Emotional Wellbeing.
- Under “*Cohesive*,” add a descriptor relating to the active participation of people of all ages in wellbeing policy.
- Finally, under the policy theme “*Healthy*,” a descriptor could be amended to be more inclusive of young people e.g., “a society that values the contribution of all regardless of health, ability or age” and “a society that supports the health and development of children and young people.”

## **6. Are there any indicators and existing data sources that will be critical to inform the emerging policy themes?**

The YA’s stressed that key indicators of the social determinants of youth mental health such as employment, affordable housing, social inclusion and non-discrimination and civic participation in policy, will be critically important to inform the policy themes. Additionally, indicators of job satisfaction, employability rates, and educational attainment were described by the YA’s as important, and one YA specifically highlighted the importance of financial stability and independence for young people. They also highlighted the importance of including indicators under each policy theme that capture a diverse range of people from different geographical areas, education levels, ages, and genders. As noted above, there was a strong recommendation that mental health should be considered as a cross-cutting issue across each theme and should be considered and measured within each accordingly.

Youth participation in wellbeing policy across portfolios should also be measured. For example, the Federal Youth Engagement Model should be transparently monitored, and indicators could be included under the Wellbeing Framework. In addition, the Youth Advisory Groups established as part of the Youth Engagement model should be involved in the development of the Measuring What Matters Framework.

The YA’s noted the importance of accountability and transparency for the chosen indicators, and critically, there was a strong recommendation that they should be measured and reported on through budget and policy processes.

## **7. Is there any additional information you would like to see in the Measuring What Matters Statement? If so, please outline.**

Our consultations highlighted the importance of accountability to ensure the success of the “Measuring What Matters” statement, including how the statement will be implemented, measured, and reported. One YA strongly believed the statement should commit to agreed dates for progress reports. Finally, the YA’s emphasise the importance of lived experience and community-led participation in research and policy, a common theme that is often discussed in our work with young people.

The Matilda Centre and our YA’s would be open to contributing further to the Measuring What Matters Framework, particularly around youth engagement in wellbeing policy.