Australian Red Cross submission to *Measuring What Matters*

About Australian Red Cross

Australian Red Cross (Red Cross) is part of the world's largest humanitarian network. Together with thousands of volunteers all around Australia, we provide humanitarian assistance to people experiencing extreme vulnerability.

Our work span includes disasters and emergencies; supporting migrants in transition; standing alongside First Nations communities as well as supporting the isolated and elderly to gain a greater degree of social inclusion.

Bound always by seven Fundamental Principles, we remain neutral, and don't take sides, including in politics; supporting us to maintain the trust of all and enabling us to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and everything we do is supported by thousands of volunteers, helping solve social issues in their own communities.

Executive summary

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the *Measuring What Matters* consultation. This index is an excellent addition to existing comprehensive and ongoing measurement tools such as *Closing the Gap*. We welcome any measure which consistently highlights the social and environmental impacts of government policy, to provide evidence of those who may be experiencing disadvantage.

Red Cross is mandated through international and domestic frameworks to assist people experiencing extreme vulnerability, and we recommend this new index captures the experiences of those with less social and economic capital. It is also an opportunity to underline the diverse experiences of all people living in Australia, providing a more detailed picture of wellbeing and vulnerability.

Red Cross has a footprint in hundreds of communities across Australia, and decades of experience in social service programs, delivering hundreds of contracts in partnership with all levels of government.

Whether developing new programs, or evaluating existing ones, monitoring and evaluation is core business for Red Cross, from deeply understanding social need, to demonstrating program effectiveness. Hence, this index offers an opportunity to talk about data more generally: we would value a greater degree of data sharing, and consistent national data sets, so that social sector organisations can readily access data unimpeded.

Equally, should *Measuring What Matters* form a part of service agreements at any point, such as reporting back on certain indicators, we recommend government consider the costs of gathering such data, and ensuring this is appropriately factored into service level agreements.

Considering the application of OECD indicators

We understand *Measuring What Matters* is using the overall OECD indicators as a baseline, which will be refined to capture a more in-depth and accurate picture of Australian wellbeing.

Overall, there would be value in adding a small number of additional indicators to address the limitations as outlined in *Budget Statement 4: Measuring What Matters.* For example, employment rate across cohorts; housing affordability; student achievement and greenhouse gas emissions. For those indicators, which inadvertently conceal social and environmental realities, indicators could be refined to capture the Australian situation more accurately.

Additionally, to reflect the intersectionality of people living in Australia, *Measuring What Matters* should include demographic diversity in its data. This will ensure the index accurately captures the full experiences of Australian life. For example, those from culturally and linguistically diverse back grounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those living with disability or mental health concerns amongst other key groups. (Please see 'commentary on overall indicators' outlined below)

We note a number of existing social wellbeing indexes in Australia, such as the Centre for Social Impact (UNSW) - Australian Social Progress Index; Wellbeing Index by Australian National Development Index Ltd (ANDI Ltd); Australian Unity Wellbeing Index and AIHW measures such as Australia's welfare 2021 data insights. We would recommend considering how these indexers can be leveraged to strengthen the overall OECD approach.

Data sharing and consistent frameworks

Additionally, to strengthen the OECD *Measuring What Matters* framework, data sharing is required across different levels of government, noting that each state and territory jurisdiction captures data which contributes to wellbeing indicators, such as police and correctional facilities data.

Common frameworks and measures are helpful for indexes of this nature, but also more generally for social sector organisations such as ours, in government contracts and reporting requirements for example. This ensures programs are addressing key community challenges and making a meaningful impact. Data is not always captured in a consistent manner to government, highlighting a lost opportunity.

Consistent data frameworks and reporting could encourage community sector organisations to work collectively to respond to common social issues rather than working in isolation. It would also give greater understanding as to what initiatives work in addressing these challenges, enabling solutions to be replicated nationally.

Another consideration more generally for government data, is the value of information sharing protocols for key emergency events. So that people only need to provide their 'proof' data to one organization for grants for example and authorise their approval details to be shared with others. This would ensure social good is supported and minimise further disruption as people cope with their emergency recovery.

Existing Red Cross outcomes frameworks

Red Cross has embarked on developing its own framework to collect and aggregate qualitative and quantitative data across all our program areas, including Migrants in Transition, Emergency Service and Community Programs.

Although each of these three areas may have different program delivery modes, we were able to determine through research on client's needs, that the outcomes for clients and communities are the

same. They all want increased social and economic participation, with intermediate outcomes of safety and resilience.

As such, although our framework is of a smaller scale, we believe that as a sector we would welcome a broader framework we contribute to, which supports sector wide demonstration of impact. This may be in the form of *Measuring What Matters* or another mechanism.

Social inclusion, connectedness and wellbeing

We note 'determinants of wellbeing' can both positively and negatively affect a person's wellbeing and influence their need for support. In addition, the determinants of wellbeing influence attitudes, behaviours and how a person responds to a crisis.

We believe that social inclusion and connectedness are positively associated with subjective wellbeing and resilience. While there is no common definition of social inclusion and connectedness, the three aspects (see Frieling 2018) of social inclusion and connectedness are frequently identified as;

- the feelings of wellbeing we gain from interacting positively with others;
- the sense of belonging (wellbeing) experienced from feeling part of a social group
- social support, help people receive, or are able to call upon in times of need from their networks

Red Cross has a keen interest in all social inclusion but in particular the reciprocal sense of wellbeing of both the recipients and those people giving that support in times of need. We routinely refer to this as the power of humanity. As such we strongly believe that volunteering is a good indicator of a healthy and productive community.

Commentary on specific indicators

Please see high level commentary on the indicators below.

Theme	Indicator	Description	Red Cross comments
Social	Homicides	The number of deaths due to assault per 100,000 people.	While we appreciate the need to keep indicators simple to ascertain public safety, this is at the severe end of the spectrum. Another suggested indicator could be measured by perceived safety at home at night (CSI), # of assaults. Additionally, consider going broader than homicide and look at violent crimes with intent per capita. Consider more detailed data and indictors available for the domain areas of crime (BOSCAR data V's # of assaults).
Social	Social interactions (time spent)*	The average amount of time spent on social interactions.	Although a valid indicator, there are other means of verification that could measure social interactions including: # of people volunteering, membership and participation in sports and attendance at places of worship. Potential data sources could include ABS census data and HILDA. AIHW also collects frequency of social contact, which is a good proxy for connection.
Social	Negative affect balance	A subjective assessment of emotions that measures the share of respondents with more negative than positive feelings.	If the aim of this indicator is to measure mental wellbeing as the indicator implies, there are other means of verification including: * Admissions to mental health facilities * Psychological and psychiatric treatments and referrals Potential data sources could be the AIHW. In addition, there are other wellbeing indicators that could the measurement of overall wellbeing including Australia's welfare indicators published by the AIHW. For example, IHW welfare data includes three subjective measures of perceived health measures. Life satisfaction, mental and physical health - this would seem like a good proxy set. Additionally, the terminology of positive vs negative feelings may be stigmatising or too simplistic. A measure of 'people who identify with having mental ill-health challenges' may be better.
Social	Student skills in science	The mean score of 15 year old students for PISA in science.	While this indicator concerns STEM, for school participation there are a number of existing tools including NAPLAN, ATAR scores and dropout rates.

| Social | Voter turnout | The number of votes cast, as a share of the population registered to vote. | As it is mandatory to vote in Australia, this indicator may not be capturing the intent of the question. A possible measure could be to understand the number of people who make an informed decision when voting. Unsure of data sources which currently capture this.

Alternatively, in the Australian context, perhaps an alternative measure could capture civic engagement, in which case the # of people volunteering their time and total hours contributed could be a possible measure. |
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| Economic | Employment rate | The share of the adult population (aged 25 to 64) who report having worked in gainful employment for at least one hour in the past week. | A minimum of 1 hour per week does not have enough rigor, especially given current award rates and increases in inflation.

Consider looking at a minimum of part-time work and fulltime work and develop a current median for casual workers as a baseline, as a separate indicator. |
| Economic | Household wealth | The total of private household assets net of financial liabilities. | Measures of equity should be considered in measuring Australia's wealth. While overall progress is a positive, consideration needs to be given to demographic differences in the distribution of wealth. |
| Economic | Overcrowding rate | The share of households living in overcrowded conditions. | Potential indicator could be census data on the number of people per household, noting that census is conducted every 5 years. Another alternative could be the AIHW Public Housing report which could be indicative of trends across this domain area |
| All measures | | | Ensure data breakdown to reflect intersectionality, whether it be race, class, gender, sexual identity for example.

This will help surface discrimination, bias and areas for policy change. |

Recommendations

Red Cross recommends:

1. A greater degree of easily accessible government data sharing across the social services sector, so that social services organisations can create more impactful programs on the ground, informed by up-to-date evidence, and a baseline, for performance tracking. This kind of data sharing could be beneficial for the *Measuring What Matters* index.

2. Consistency of data reporting requirements across government contracts, to enable social services organisations to collaborate and respond collectively to social issues.

3. Government invests in the necessary costs of data, should social services organisations like Red Cross be called on to contribute to local, state or national research.

4. Consider leveraging the existing array of social wellbeing indexes in Australia, to align with existing datasets and findings.

5. Maintain long term and existing indexes on specific topics, so that *Measuring What Matters* is a complementary index.

6. Ensure demographic diversity is appropriately captured in the data, to ensure the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQ, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people living with disability and mental health concerns experiences are understood.

7. Expanding OECD baseline to better capture the reality of housing affordability, climate change, equal opportunity when it comes to workforce participation and school participation.