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MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

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SUBMISSION

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### SUBMISSION

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Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to Treasury's proposed adaptation of the *OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress*. This submission emphasises the importance of measuring health as part of a wellbeing framework, recommends the inclusion of two mental health indicators, and identifies the importance of integrating the national wellbeing framework as a guiding principle within Federation Funding Agreements.

If you wish to discuss this submission further, please contact David Baker, Manager, Policy ([david.baker@orygen.org.au](mailto:david.baker@orygen.org.au)).

### ABOUT ORYGEN

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Orygen conducts clinical research, runs clinical services (five headspace centres), supports the professional development of the youth mental health workforce, and provides policy advice relating to young people's mental health. Our current research strengths include: early psychosis, mood disorders, personality disorders, functional recovery, suicide prevention, online interventions, neurobiology and health economics.

### DEFINING WELLBEING

Wellbeing is influenced by life events and context, including the determining influence of risk and protective factors on an individual's quality of life.(1, 2) These factors, also referred to as social determinants, include environmental, structural, economic, cultural, biomedical, commercial, and digital factors.(3) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) wellbeing framework has eleven key dimensions: income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, knowledge and skills, environment quality, subjective wellbeing, safety, work-life balance, social connections, and civil engagement.(4) In developing a national framework it must be recognised that individuals will have their own subjective perception and experience of their wellbeing.

Young people's perceptions of factors shaping their wellbeing are related to their life contexts and experiences. Social relationships and managing stress have been identified by young people as having a significant impact on their wellbeing. The Mission Australia Youth Survey 2022 found a negative link between experiences of financial and housing instability and wellbeing.(5) In Orygen's consultations with young people about their experience of life transitions, changes in friendships were identified as having the greatest impact on their wellbeing.(6)

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has grouped social determinants into six categories – using a health perspective (see Table 1). The World Health Organization has identified that addressing social determinants of health requires action to improve daily living conditions; tackle inequity; and measure the problem and evaluate the impact of responses.(7)

**TABLE 1 SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH**

Social determinant	What it looks like
<b>Socioeconomic position</b>	educational attainment, income, or level of occupation
<b>Early childhood</b>	physical, social/emotional and language/cognition development
<b>Family relationships</b>	safe and supportive emotional and learning environment, and provision of access to services, products, and activities
<b>Social inclusion</b>	practical and emotional help and support
<b>Employment and work</b>	instil self-esteem and a positive sense of identity, provide opportunity for social interaction and personal development
<b>Housing</b>	appropriate, affordable, and secure housing

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (8)

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Measuring both health and mental health is a critical indicator of community wellbeing and potential socioeconomic progress. Along with physical health, mental health intersects with and determines a person's participation across a range of wellbeing indicators. The link has been emphasised in the Productivity Commission's Mental Health report, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and by the National Mental Health Commission.(9-11) The National Mental Health Commission's Vision 2030 strategy – developed with extensive community engagement – recognised that:

*The people most at risk of poor mental health outcomes are also the people most at risk in other areas of life.(12)*

The Vision 2030 strategy identifies that wellbeing, social determinants, and mental health are interlinked. These linkages require integration in policy, service delivery, and working with people to build a 'strong, sustainable, and effective approach to mental health care.'(12)

The development of a wellbeing framework for Australia needs to ensure the selected indicators have utility for measuring mental health outcomes in order to inform budget decisions. The measurement of mental health outcomes provides an evidence-base for evaluating funded programs and prioritising new and continued program funding within a range of portfolios. The ability to integrate wellbeing metrics and budget decisions will better enable the implementation of Australian Government policy and strategy.

## MEASURES OF MENTAL HEALTH FOR AN AUSTRALIAN WELLBEING INDEX

The importance of mental health to wellbeing is recognised in the inclusion of a new mental health indicator in the updated version of the OECD framework. The *How's Life 2020* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) document now includes a measure of depressive symptoms reported in the past two weeks. The framework also retains a previous measure of death by suicide and acute alcohol use or drug overdose.(13)

Measuring depressive symptoms is a positive, though limited, improvement in the OECD framework.

Within an Australian context there is an opportunity to use existing data collections to inform a measure of mental health outcomes within a national wellbeing framework. Orygen recommends that two measures are incorporated into the wellbeing framework under development:

1. the onset of mental ill-health; and
2. prevalence of long-term mental health conditions.

## Measuring onset

Measuring the onset of mental ill-health will enable the targeting of prevention and early intervention funding in the budget. This measure will predominantly capture data for young people (12–25 years) as the onset of most lifetime mental ill-health and disorders occurs during this life stage.(14, 15) There is a precedent for youth-focused wellbeing measures in the OECD framework (for example, Cognitive skills at age 15; and Youth not in employment, education or training).(13)

Including the onset of mental ill-health will initially require a composite indicator from existing data sources on help-seeking presentations in primary care (including headspace and other youth mental health services). The development of a mental ill-health onset indicator and data collection will fill an existing data gap and strengthen existing data collections.

### OPPORTUNITY

**Treasury fund a feasibility study for a mental ill-health onset indicator as part of the development and implementation program for the national wellbeing framework.**

## Long-term mental health conditions

Measuring the prevalence of long-term mental health conditions will support an analysis of other wellbeing indicators impacted by mental ill-health, for example workforce participation. Identifying intersections between wellbeing indicators and domains will enable a more sophisticated assessment of budget submissions and measurement of wellbeing outcomes from budget spending.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has compared long-term health conditions data sources, including the 2021 Census.(16) Data collection exists for long-term mental health conditions, including for First Nations people and young people, enabling inclusion in the national wellbeing framework.

### RECOMMENDATION

**Treasury incorporate two mental health indicators in the national wellbeing framework. The indicators are (1) onset of mental ill-health and (2) long-term mental health conditions.**

## ALIGNING BUDGETS WITH A WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

The national wellbeing framework is being developed to inform the Australian Government's budget process. Aligning budget allocations with wellbeing objectives will enable investment to be directed to improving individual and communal wellbeing, and measurable impact that can inform future budgets. While seemingly straightforward, Federal spending intersects vertically across three tiers of government and horizontally between government departments and agencies. Achieving improved wellbeing outcomes will require cooperative and collaborative investment between levels of government and across departments.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Considering how to improve mental health outcomes requires that governments and service systems work together to achieve improved wellbeing. For example, the potential causes of depressive symptoms include a combination of life events, personal factors, and changes in the brain.(17) Life events such as work or education stress, unemployment, negative relationships, and social isolation are all wellbeing factors.

A wellbeing budget will recognise that mental health support and treatment is only part of the wellbeing equation; and that investment across a range of domains will contribute to wellbeing outcomes. In addition to the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention National Agreement, there will be potential mental health benefits from investment through other agreements. For example, the Federation Funding Agreement – Education and Skills to support young Australian's education engagement and attainment, and transition to and connection with the workforce, including those with

a lived experience of mental ill-health. The development of a national wellbeing framework will provide an overarching framework within which the five existing Federation Funding Agreements sit.

Enhancing wellbeing needs to be a guiding principle of these agreements. Amending the existing agreements in parallel with the implementation of a wellbeing framework and budget will maximise the effectiveness of all three policy levers.

#### **OPPORTUNITY**

**Australian, state and territory governments amend Federation Funding Agreements to include the national wellbeing framework as a guiding principle.**

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