

# Community Wellbeing Indicators for South Australian Local Government (2019.68)

## Final Report and Evaluation

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## PART 1. About the Project

### Introduction

The Southern and Hills LGA (S&HLGA) has undertaken a project called Community Wellbeing Indicators for South Australian Local Government (CWI) with funding from the Local Government Research and Development Scheme (reference 2019.68). This developed a model framework, with relevant indicators, measures and data sources, to inform action by local government on important issues of community wellbeing.

### Background

Local governments improve community wellbeing through a range of initiatives, under the Local Government Act, SA Public Health Act 2011 and a range of plans and strategies generated by Councils themselves. Councils' contribution to community wellbeing includes a broad range of projects, programs and services including community services, regulatory services, environmental resource management, public infrastructure (eg footpaths, community and cultural venues, sport and recreation facilities), public open space and play opportunities. These

are important determinants of health and wellbeing, providing opportunities for healthy lifestyles, social connections and healthy environments at the local community level.

However, finding data to inform council initiatives in community wellbeing and public health is a significant challenge, especially for small to medium sized local governments. Indicators offer a solution as they are summary measures of social, economic and environmental phenomena that allow policy officers without data backgrounds a way to keep a track of something as complex as community wellbeing in a simple way.

Some larger SA councils have had community wellbeing monitoring tools that are tailored to their Councils' needs for information and capacity for data management (eg City of Onkaparinga and City of Charles Sturt). These typically rely on a dedicated and skilled staff resource to collect, analyse and present the data – a resource that is rarely available in small to medium Councils. As a result, the majority of councils across South Australia are implementing their Strategic Plans and Regional Public Health Plans without the benefit of good quality measures and data sources to monitor community wellbeing and public health at the local level.

Without accessible data, many councils are making decisions about action and interventions designed to improve community wellbeing without data that shows how the public health and wellbeing areas local governments contribute to are tracking.

[What is the challenge addressed by this project and what does success look like?](#)

The project addresses a need for improved data to inform public health planning and action by Local Governments. Success involves resolving two issues.

1. Finding and interpreting data is daunting for many council officers, particularly in regional councils where officers may be wearing many hats. They can find it can be difficult to find relevant and high-quality data at the LGA level. Many councils are not able to employ a dedicated data specialist to assist. The project sought to address this by developing a tool that is designed around the areas of community wellbeing that councils are able to address, is user friendly and able to be updated easily with new data and indicators.
2. There is a myth that robust local government data exists for all the issues that are important to our communities, but this is not true. Many emerging public health challenges do not have data sources, or have data that is not in a condition that can be currently be used or compared. Examples include data that can describe social isolation, impacts of climate change on our natural and built environments, walkability of areas, changing patterns of service access, the impacts of housing price rises on essential workers,

community engagement in decisions by local councils, etc. Without simple data on these topics, officers cannot effectively plan or build partnerships that can address many of our communities' greatest concerns. The project sought to highlight these data gaps for further development to assist better public health planning now, and into the future.

By addressing these two problems, the project contributes to improved decision-making in public health planning and a range of other strategic planning and service provision decisions, by providing a high-quality evidence base about important aspects of community wellbeing. This will inform action at the council level and discussions between local government, other levels of government, industry/business and the community. This recognises that local governments are rarely the sole party influencing community wellbeing.

The Community Wellbeing Indicators project posed the following questions:

1. Can we design an indicator framework that could be suitable for use in small and regional councils to inform the work they do on community wellbeing?
2. Can we find and apply data available at the LGA level which will provide sound evidence about what makes a difference to the determinants of health at the local and regional level, and which can identify trends over time?
3. Can we co-design the indicator framework with local government staff from across a range of functions and disciplines, and across the state?
4. Can we embed in the indicator framework a strong relationship to the 'levers' (spheres of control and influence) available to local government?

The CWI project has answered these questions in the affirmative. The S&HLGA has developed, through a co-design process with the LG sector and public health stakeholders, a model indicator framework for community wellbeing which can be used by small and regional councils, and which has a strong connection to the determinants of health and the levers available to local government.

The development process for the model indicator framework included participation by:

- a project steering group with local and state government representatives and data experts
- a consultant with national expertise in this field who reviewed:
  - community plans, research and the strategic and public health plans of the 6 member councils of the S&HLGA to determine what is important to these communities (the framework story)
  - existing indicator sets at Local Government, State and Commonwealth government level

- potential of new data platforms such as AURIN<sup>1</sup> to meet the information needs of local government regarding community wellbeing
- Close to 100 people representing 31 LGAs (14 metropolitan and 17 regional councils) and 10 other public health stakeholder organisations who developed and tested the framework.



Photo:

Local Government staff and public health stakeholders discussing the draft Indicator Framework at a workshop at LG House in May 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN) is a collaborative national network of researchers and data providers across the academic, government, and private sectors. AURIN provide an online workbench with access to multidisciplinary datasets. See <https://aurin.org.au/>.

Workshop participants were asked to review the framework story in relation to their work and select indicators that would best represent that story and be most useful to them. They were asked to apply a set of criteria to indicator selection, to ensure every indicator was:

- focused on outcomes for which local government has levers
- theoretically sound – have clarity about what they are summarising
- commonly understood – are understood and agreed on by a range of audiences, and
- technically accurate – could be sourced from a robust, accurate time series data collection.

The resulting framework includes:

- 20 outcome indicators and data that can be used to monitor them
- identification of data gaps and priorities for further development
- a preferred format for the indicators – an e-book with embedded indicator data tables, explanations of data, links to more detailed data sources for follow-up, and maps and case studies for context.

The first report using the model framework was generated for the 6 councils in the S&HLGA region.

### [Learnings from the project](#)

Findings and learnings from the Community Wellbeing Indicators Project include:

- although intended to mainly benefit small and regional councils, the Indicator Framework is of considerable interest to staff at larger and metropolitan councils who also struggle with finding and interpreting data for their LGA (according to feedback provided on the draft Indicator Framework by staff at 14 metropolitan councils).
- there are a few topics where different indicators would be selected by metro and regional councils (for example ‘access to nature’).
- one essential area in the framework – access to services – needs development as there is high variability in services offered by different councils, conceptual issues, and problems with data quality, that could not be addressed by this project.
- there are significant data gaps for some issues that are important to communities and councils, highly relevant to public health and community wellbeing and amenable to council impact.

- the indicator framework can be used to monitor community wellbeing and to inform council's work but *is not* suitable for monitoring council performance as local government does not control all the levers.

### Next steps

In early 2022 the project will be further promoted to the Local Government sector with a launch event and seminar focussed on evidence-based policy and decision-making in Local Government.

There is an opportunity for a second stage of the project in order to

- demonstrate the utility of the Indicator Framework in practice – how it can be used in a range of ways and different contexts in the work of local government
- demonstrate how data generated by councils themselves eg on open space, local facilities, service and programs can be incorporated into the indicator framework
- understand how recognised data gaps in the SA Public Health Indicator Framework (2017) can be addressed by the CWI for local government eg public infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing at the local level
- understand how the CWI framework can be 'institutionalised' so that it is updated regularly, kept relevant and available to all councils across the State.

The *Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report* includes a strategy for addressing priority data gaps, and this will be used to identify potential research partners and funders and investigate the delivery of a second stage of the CWI project.

## Summary

The Community Wellbeing Indicators for South Australian Local Government project has achieved what it set out to do, as described below in the Program Logic Evaluation Report. Through a highly collaborative process it developed a model Indicator Framework that addresses the role and influence of local government on Community Wellbeing. It has produced a valuable product for future development and use in the local government sector: a consistent indicator set to track the determinants of health at the LGA level.

The project strengthened collaboration between council staff in the S&HLGA region involved with community wellbeing, public health and strategic planning, as well as collaboration between local government and state government agencies (SA Health and Wellbeing SA).



The first report generated with the Indicator Framework, *Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report for the Southern and Hills LGA*, can be used immediately to inform public health actions by councils in that region. It will be used as part of the State of Health analysis for the next S&HLGA Regional Public Health Plan (currently in development).

Alongside these benefits for Local Government, the project has contributed to strengthening the systems that support public health and wellbeing. This is a priority of the State Public Health Plan (2019 – 2024). This contribution was recognised when S&HLGA received the 2021 Minister for Health and Wellbeing's *Award for Excellence in Public Health* in the Regional category for the Community Wellbeing Indicators in SA Local government project.

## PART 2. Program Logic Evaluation Report

**Table 1. Inputs to the Project**

INPUTS - Who	INPUTS - What
Steering Committee members	Governance: Contribution to decisions Expertise and knowledge of local government Disciplinary knowledge and skills Knowledge and experience of data and indicators Advice and feedback regarding the engagement and communications plan Review of project outputs
S&HLGA – Executive Officer and Community Wellbeing Project Manager	Governance: Contribution to decisions, project management and coordination, preparation of Agenda and Minutes, financial management, monitoring and reporting, preparation of Terms of Reference, Expression of Interest, Request for Quote and service agreement documentation, communications and engagement plan Liaison with consultant Review of project outputs Knowledge of evaluation, collection of data, preparation of the project reports to LGA Knowledge of relevant public health stakeholders and networks
Consultants	Expert disciplinary knowledge, skills and experience Credibility as highly regarded public health practitioner and specialist in Indicators Industry contacts Experience of Local Government High standard of services provided to deliver the project outputs and outcomes
Local government staff	Knowledge of local government Knowledge of community wellbeing and other specialist areas that impact on community wellbeing Understanding of community wellbeing issues in their LGA and scope of local government influence Understanding of data sources
Public health agencies and NGO stakeholders	Understanding of the determinants of health Knowledge of Local Government’s role in public health Understanding of data sources Understanding of policy priorities of government
LGR&D grant	\$50,000 grant funding to deliver the project



Table 2. Outputs - Activities undertaken within the project

OUTPUTS	Was it achieved?	Evidence of achievement and effectiveness
Steering group formed with ToR	YES	Terms of Reference were developed and adopted. Minutes were kept of the meetings. Membership of Steering Group included S&HLGA, four Councils (Adelaide Hills, Victor Harbor, Barossa and Port Adelaide Enfield), Wellbeing SA, SA Health and Torrens University (Public Health Information Development Unit). The Steering Group membership reflected the diversity of councils and stakeholders in public health.
Steering group meetings	YES	Minutes show that 12 people were involved in 6 Steering Group meetings. The Steering Group provided effective guidance to the project and ensured the project was informed by relevant State agency initiatives, strategic and policy context, experience with indicator sets developed in other jurisdictions and SA local government practice.
Request for Quote (RFQ) developed and consultants engaged through select tender	YES	Outcome of RFQ was a service agreement with Jeanette Pope. Service Agreement finalised January 2020.
Develop an evaluation plan	YES	An evaluation framework was prepared using the Program Logic approach.
Develop a communications and engagement plan	YES	Communications Plan was developed and updated during the project.
Conduct environmental scan and develop a Discussion Paper	YES	The consultant liaised with a range of councils to understand what indicators were in use, and what existing indicator frameworks were relevant to consider. Environmental Scan included review of S&HLGA member Council's Strategic Plans and any community engagement about issues, that was publicly available.  A discussion piece was presented to the Steering Committee. It included a theoretical framework, linked to the role of local government, experience with Indicators in other jurisdictions, criteria for selecting indicators, and a selection of indicators to start discussions with councils.
Targeted stakeholder engagement and input to Discussion Paper and	YES	The consultant facilitated 5 workshops with S&HLGA region council staff to populate the draft Indicator framework with measures. A broad range of Council staff participated.

Draft Indicator Framework		The process was iterative, so the results of each workshop was written up, measures sourced, and the updated framework presented to the next workshop.
Develop a Draft Indicator Framework	YES	The framework was written up as the draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i> based on the stakeholder engagement, environmental scan and Discussion Paper. The draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i> was discussed with Steering Group.
Conduct consultation on the draft framework	YES	<p>The draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i> was presented and discussed with S&amp;HLGA Board, Community Managers Network of LG Professionals and SA Public Health Council. The Project Manager also requested an opportunity to present at LGA bodies (SAROC and GAROC) but was unsuccessful in this.</p> <p>Three workshops for the Local Government sector and public health stakeholders were conducted to test and refine the indicators in the draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i>. The workshops were promoted by email and through the LGA's Latest News and SA Health's Public Health Communique.</p> <p>One workshop was held by Zoom to include people in regional councils. Two were held in the LG House.</p> <p>The project achieved very effective engagement with almost 100 staff from local governments and public health stakeholders in 8 workshops to develop, test and refine the framework. This included representatives from 31 LGAs (14 metropolitan and 17 regional councils) and 10 other public health stakeholder organisations.</p>
Revise the Indicator Framework and prepare a User Guide	YES	<p>The Indicator Framework and draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i> were revised on the basis of the sector feedback from the sector and stakeholders. A number of additional potential data sources were examined as suggested by stakeholders, but most were not available at the LGA level.</p> <p>A user guide was written into the front of the draft <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing Report</i>. Stakeholders at the workshops reported they would like case studies of use of the data once the report was published, and funding will be sought for that.</p>
Undertake evaluation activities with workshop participants	YES	A separate evaluation survey was not produced but the workshops were based on discussion followed by voting (recorded as sticker votes on table worksheets) about the utility of each indicator. This was used to ensure the final set of indicators were voted on as the most useful set for stakeholders.

		Each workshop also concluded with a short feedback session and voting on the utility of the set overall and the desired product. This was documented in the final section of the report and additional funding will be sort for things like reports for other geographic areas that were out of scope for this project.
Presentation to relevant organisations, networks and conferences	In Progress	A request to present at the LGA Showcase was made. The Showcase event has been postponed to 2022.  A launch event is now being planned for February 2022.
Were there any other outputs?	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project was aiming to develop a framework of community wellbeing indicators, but we have also been able to produce the first <i>Indicators of Community Wellbeing</i> report for the S&amp;HLGA region at no additional cost.</li> <li>• This report models the e-book format that the LG sector and stakeholder consultation endorsed.</li> <li>• A strategy to fill priority gaps in the data was developed and is documented in the end of this report.</li> <li>• A funding application for the second stage of the project was developed by July 2021 (outcome unsuccessful) and will be pursued again in 2022 once the report has been launched.</li> <li>• A nomination was prepared for Minister’s Award for Excellence in Public Health. Outcome was the project was a finalist and received the Award for Excellence in Public Health in the Regional Category on 29 October 2021.</li> </ul>

*Note on the LGR&DS grant application timeframes and milestones:*

The CWI project was started in October 2019 and was progressing well until April 2020 when impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. At this time, several members of the Steering Group were required to be focussed on managing impacts of the pandemic on their staff and communities. The decision was made to pause the project. After restarting in early 2021, the Indicators of Community Wellbeing report was completed and approved by the S&HLGA Board in August 2021. This Evaluation Report was completed in October 2021.

Table 3. Outcomes and impact of the project on the local government sector

OUTCOMES	Timeframe	Indicators	Was it achieved?	Evidence of achievement and impact
<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Local government sector is engaged in development of the Indicator Framework</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Collaboration across the Local Government Sector</p>	Immediate	1. Number of local government staff who participate in stakeholder engagement sessions	YES	<p>The project had a high impact as indicated by participation from the Local Government sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>4</b> councils were represented on the Steering Group</li> <li>• <b>35</b> staff from <b>7</b> councils (5 in the S&amp;HLGA region, plus The Barossa and Light Regional Councils) participated in the first round of 5 workshops that developed the draft Indicator Framework.</li> <li>• <b>58</b> local government staff from <b>29</b> councils were engaged in 3 workshops to test and refine the Indicator Framework. These staff were from a range of disciplines and roles.</li> <li>• The participation of the LG sector also included representatives from two regional organisations (S&amp;HLGA and Legatus), LGA SA and Local Government Professionals (Community Managers Network).</li> </ul>
		2. Number of small, medium and large Councils represented	YES	<p>The project had a high impact as indicated by participation by representatives from councils of varying sizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>9</b> small councils (under 20,000 residents)</li> <li>• <b>15</b> medium-sized councils</li> <li>• <b>7</b> large councils (over 70,000 residents)</li> </ul>
		3. % of Metropolitan and % Regional councils engaged	YES	<p>The project had a high impact as indicated by engagement of diversity of council types.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of <b>31</b> Councils were engaged in the development of the Community Wellbeing Indicators. This included <b>45% metropolitan</b> (n=14) and <b>55% regional councils</b> (n=17)</li> </ul>

<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Public Health stakeholders and partners are engaged in the development of the Indicator Framework</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Collaboration across the Local Government Sector</p>	<p>Immediate</p>	<p>Number of Public Health stakeholders and organisations (non-Council) that participated</p>	<p>YES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project had a good level of impact as indicated by non-council organisations who were engaged (n = 10). These were: SA Health, Wellbeing SA, PHIDU, SA Public Health Council, LGA SA, S&amp;HLGA, LG Professionals (Community Manager’s Network), Legatus, Heart Foundation, and Healthy Environs Pty Ltd.</li> <li>• The project strengthened collaboration between local and state government (SA Health and Wellbeing SA) through the Steering Group and collaborative development of the Indicator Framework.</li> <li>• Other relevant organisations could be targeted for involvement in the future development of the CWI project. It was disappointing that we did not achieve participation by the Country SA PHN, who were directly invited and who had provided a letter of support for the LGR&amp;DS grant application.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Additional Outcome:</i> Final Indicator Framework reflects the input from Councils, and diverse stakeholders</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Collaboration across the Local Government Sector</p>	<p>Immediate</p>	<p>Description of how the Indicator Framework changed as a result of LG sector and stakeholder engagement.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>There was a very high impact from the engagement and collaboration techniques employed during the project.</p> <p>A range of changes were made to the indicator set over the consultation particularly to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change indicators because of particular community interests (e.g. bushfire impacts)</li> <li>• Address differences noted about the utility of common urban indicators in regional areas (e.g. open space vs tree canopy coverage, telecommunications coverage, service access)</li> <li>• Remove indicators that were not robust (e.g. conservation volunteers on Onkaparinga’s experience of it)</li> <li>• Reconcile differences in the mix of services provided in different regional LGA (e.g. different councils provide completely different levels of child, youth, family, aged services)</li> <li>• In response to new data sources that were suggested by stakeholders</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure data gaps for important topics remained in the set to create a data development agenda (included in the report)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Local government sector is informed about the value of using data and indicators in the work of local government</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Councils have knowledge and capacity to improve services</p>	Immediate	% of participants in stakeholder engagement sessions that report increased understanding in evaluation survey	PARTIALLY	<p>This action falls under the communications plan. It has commenced with the presentations and workshops described in the Outputs table above and will also depend on the launch and dissemination strategy.</p> <p>Although a survey tool was not used, the 8 workshops to develop and test the Indicator Framework were highly interactive. In small groups, participants contributed and shared knowledge about relevant data sources and indicators, and the utility of these in a local government setting.</p> <p>The final 3 workshops also involved voting on which indicators to keep and remove. Thus, the local government officers and other stakeholders were able to shape the Indicator Framework to ensure its relevance to their need for data to inform their work.</p> <p>Furthermore, letters of support provided by 6 councils and 3 regional LGAs for a funding application by S&amp;HLGA for a proposed Stage 2 of the CWI project indicates that councils and stakeholders were informed about the value of using data and indicators in local government.</p>
<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Increased knowledge of community wellbeing data sources and indicators for use</p>	Immediate	Number of local government staff who download the draft and final indicator framework, and the user guide.	PARTIALLY	<p>The project has increased knowledge about community wellbeing data sources and indicators for use by local government amongst the Steering Group and workshop participants.</p> <p>However, the indicator cannot be measured until the report is launched and available publicly (beyond the S&amp;HLGA member councils).</p>

<p>by local government.</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Councils have knowledge and capacity to improve services</p>				<p>This was initially proposed to be presented (and potentially launched) at LGA's Council Showcase event in October 2021. This event was rescheduled to April 2022.</p> <p>A launch event is now planned for early 2022. This timing also has the benefit of being after state borders have reopened and the project consultant will be able to travel to SA from Victoria to contribute to the launch event.</p>
<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Increased use of community wellbeing indicators for evidence-based decisions in local government</p> <p><i>LGR&amp;DS Outcome:</i> Councils have knowledge and capacity to improve services</p>	Intermediate	Number of SA Councils who adopt the Indicator Framework (or part thereof) for use in Strategic Plans, Regional Public Health Plans and reporting during the 4 years following the project completion.	N/A	<p>Beyond scope of Evaluation.</p> <p>Funding will be sought to measure this through the creation of case studies about how the data is used as suggested in stakeholder workshops.</p>
<p><i>Grant application outcome:</i> Community wellbeing improved through</p>	Long-term	This is the ultimate purpose of the project, but it is not within scope to measure this. There is potential to	N/A	Beyond scope of Evaluation.

local government actions  <i>LGR&amp;DS</i> <i>Outcome:</i> Councils are thought leaders and ready for the future		measure this through the Chief Public Health Officer's Report.		
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