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Measures of Indigenous Wellbeing and Their Determinants Across the Lifecourse

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Introduction and overview

ABS
Australian Bureau of Statistics

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) framework (ABS 2001), wellbeing is 'a state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life'. This is an attractive concept upon which to base and evaluate government policy. Unlike its more narrow counterparts—for example income or socioeconomic status—wellbeing is a concept that almost everyone would agree should be higher. However, while these other narrower measures are somewhat straightforward to measure at the national, regional, community or personal level,[1] wellbeing is inherently difficult to define and even more difficult to measure on a comparable basis. The completeness and complexity of wellbeing comes at the cost of tractability.

There are two options when faced with a concept that is intuitively appealing but difficult to measure. The first is to focus on other, simpler measures. In essence, measure what is measurable. For example, those countries or individuals with higher income tend to report higher levels of wellbeing (Clark, Frijters & Shields 2008; Deaton 2008; Kahneman & Deaton 2010). Given this positive relationship, would it not be sufficient to focus on simply increasing individual or aggregate income?

There are three reasons for why income (or consumption/expenditure) is not a completely satisfactory substitute for more detailed measures of wellbeing. First, although the relationship is positive, it is non-linear. Higher levels of income lead to higher levels of happiness or other measures of wellbeing, but only up to a point. Kahneman and Deaton (2010: 16490) show that 'the effects of income on the emotional dimension of wellbeing satiate fully at an annual income of ~$75,000 [US]'. In the same article, the authors showed that even with measures of wellbeing that do not appear to satiate (for example life evaluation), there are diminishing returns, with a greater absolute increase in income required for the same increase in wellbeing at the upper end of the distribution. The same is true at the national level, with increases in income associated with increases in wellbeing only up to a point (Easterlin 2010).

The second reason for not using income as a substitute for wellbeing is that the distribution of income matters. Income matters for wellbeing not just because of what it allows one to consume, but also for the way it positions a person in society. According to Clark, Frijters and Shields (2008: 137) 'higher income brings both consumption and status benefits to an individual'. Importantly, '[c]omparisons can either be to others or to oneself in the past'. The first point explains why a rise in income for a society as a whole will not lead to improvements in happiness or

1. While there are difficulties in measuring the distribution of income and variation in employment or education, these tend to relate to difficulties in sample selection rather than conceptualisation or questionnaire design. It is interesting to note, however, that in the 1998 American General Social Survey only 1 per cent of respondents failed to answer the question on happiness compared to 17 per cent of respondents who refused to provide earnings (Kahneman & Krueger 2006).

wellbeing beyond a certain point whereas the second point means that an individual requires steadily increasing income to have high levels of subjective wellbeing. This habituation means that an individual who receives small annual pay increases over a five-year period (for example) is quite likely to report a higher level of subjective wellbeing than someone who received a one-off increase five years earlier (even if the latter had higher total income over the period).

The third main limitation of income is that it matters how that income is generated. At a national or societal level, increases in income that come at the cost of environmental degradation will probably not lead to increases in wellbeing. At an individual level, increases in income that come at the expense of additional commuting time or at the expense of social relationships may have a similar zero or even negative effect on wellbeing (Kahneman & Kreuger 2006).

Taking these three limitations together, government policy that solely aims to improve income or some other measure of socioeconomic status, or a policy that is evaluated using socioeconomic status as a proxy may not lead to sustained improvements in wellbeing and may even have unintended negative consequences. This is true for nations as a whole, as well as for particular population subgroups.

Returning to the trade-off between completeness and tractability, rather than using proxies for wellbeing, the second more attractive alternative is to carefully design robust measures of wellbeing and collect and analyse them continuously and consistently. This is, of course, easier said than done.

In this paper, I discuss a number of issues with regards to the definition, measurement and analysis of wellbeing. I begin in the next section with a discussion of the subjective nature of wellbeing and the implications for its measurement. In the section that follows I consider the difference between emotional wellbeing and life evaluation, including a discussion of the relative merits of positive compared to negative measures of wellbeing (illbeing). I then touch briefly on the relationship between wellbeing and a few other concepts—namely, mental health, social inclusion/exclusion and capabilities.

In the final two sections of the paper, I focus on the implications of the discussion for Indigenous policy and Indigenous research in Australia. Across a number of indicators, Indigenous Australians have been found to have poorer outcomes than the non-Indigenous population. Their incomes are lower, they are less likely to be employed, less likely to be attending or have completed education and have worse health on average (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2009). Furthermore, there is substantial systematic variation

SCRGSP
Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision

within the Indigenous population on these and other measures by geography (Biddle 2009) or by individual characteristics (Biddle and Yap 2010).

As discussed in this introduction and elaborated on in the remainder of this paper, there is not a simple one-to-one relationship between socioeconomic status and wellbeing. However, there has been very little explicit empirical analysis of the subjective wellbeing of Indigenous Australians either compared to the non-Indigenous population or in isolation. As outlined in the relevant section, an Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian with given levels of material standard of living and socioeconomic status may report quite different levels of wellbeing. This may be because of language differences and how questions of wellbeing are asked, however it may also be because of different cultural notions of what high levels of wellbeing entails. Even leaving aside these issues, there is also a strong possibility that because Indigenous Australians are on average at different points on the income, education or occupation distribution, a per unit change in socioeconomic status may have quite a different effect on subjective wellbeing, however defined.

The subjective nature of wellbeing

Ultimately, the subjective nature of the concept of wellbeing is one of its strengths. By focusing on how an individual actually feels (rather than how one might expect them to feel based on objective characteristics) it is possible to obtain more accurate predictions of future behaviour. According to Clark, Frijters and Shields (2008: 119; referring to Kahneman et al. 1993; Frijters 2000; and Shiv and Huber 2000) '[m]any panel studies have found that subjective well-being at time *t* predicts future behaviour, in that individuals clearly choose to discontinue activities associated with low levels of well-being'. However, this subjectivity raises a number of methodological issues that are absent or easier to mitigate with more objective measures like income, wealth or education.

Cross-nationally (and cross-culturally) it is not clear whether English words like happy, sad, satisfied, anxious, etc., have exact translations. According to linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2004: 37) it is an 'illusion … to think that the English words *happy* and *happiness* have exact semantic equivalents'[2] in other languages (including European languages) and that 'the differences … are particularly striking in the case of the adjective'. Finding an exact translation to 'are you a happy person' is quite difficult.

Even for those who speak the same language, there are scaling issues when it comes to measuring wellbeing. For example, two people may have the same level of

2. *Italics* in the original.

satisfaction with their life with one saying that they are "satisfied" and the other that they are "very satisfied". Alternatively, one may rate their satisfaction on a scale of zero to ten as a six and the other as an eight. If these differences in scaling or the use of adjectives are distributed randomly across the population then the only effect will be on measurement accuracy. However, if there are systematic differences by social, cultural or demographic characteristics, then there may be a bias in the results.

Emotional wellbeing compared to life evaluation

According to Kahneman and Deaton (2010: 16489) '[e]motional well-being refers to the emotional quality of an individual's everyday experience—the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger and affection that make one's life pleasant or unpleasant'. Kahneman and Krueger (2006: 4) define the similar concept of experienced utility as 'a continuous hedonic flow of pleasure or pain'. Diener (1994: 106) also talks about two distinctive components of subjective wellbeing but instead labels the first as the affective part or 'the pleasantness experienced in feelings, emotions and moods'.

Generally speaking, at each particular point in time, an individual experiences a certain level of pleasure or pain, positive and negative utility, or positive and negative affect. When summed over a day, year or lifetime, this gives a measure of experienced or emotional wellbeing which can then be compared across individuals or compared within individuals at different points in time.

The most robust way to measure emotional wellbeing is through the experience sampling method (ESM) (Scollon, Chu & Diener 2003; Stone, Shiffman & Devries 1999). This technique involves survey respondents carrying a portable electronic device throughout the day and being asked for their subjective wellbeing at either a set time or random intervals. Respondents can also be concurrently asked questions on their environment or activities. According to Kahneman and Krueger (2006: 9), results from ESM indicate that '[p]ositive are highly intercorrelated, while the correlations among negative emotions (like being angry or depressed) are also positive but lower.' That is, people who report positive emotions at one point in time through ESM tend to report positive emotions at other times. Negative emotions tend to occur more unevenly.

ESM
experience sampling method

An alternative to the ESM is the day reconstruction method (DRM) (Kahneman et al. 2004), where respondents are asked to keep a diary of events and measures of subjective, emotional wellbeing the day before. The DRM is less onerous for respondents but has been shown (by Kahneman et al. 2004) to correlate very closely with reports from ESM.

DRM
day reconstruction method

A less rigorous but more commonly used technique to measure emotional wellbeing is to ask people the frequency of particular emotions over a recent time period—often four weeks. Two sets of questions that use such recall techniques are the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (ABS 2003) and the Short-Form-36 questionnaire.[3] Because these questionnaires need only be administered once, they are a relatively cheap way to obtain information on emotional wellbeing. For example, a slightly modified version of the Kessler 5 scale was used in the most recent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) to measure psychological distress (negative emotional wellbeing) alongside four questions from the Short-Form-36 to measure positive wellbeing.

NATSISS
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

The obvious limitation of questions on emotional wellbeing in the immediate past is the strong potential for recall bias. In particular, respondents to such questionnaires have been shown to be dominated by 'peak and end evaluation' (Redelmeier & Kahneman 1996: 3) where a person's evaluation of their emotional wellbeing over a given period of time is dominated by peaks in positive and negative experiences and their emotional wellbeing immediately prior to being interviewed.

This raises the issue of a policymaker concerned with improving emotional wellbeing in a community who may be faced with the dilemma of whether to focus on maximising positive wellbeing (happiness, enjoyment, etc.) as opposed to minimising negative wellbeing (sadness, stress, etc.). In many instances, the distinction is not necessary. Those individuals with high levels of positive tend to have low levels of negative affect or illbeing. However, while there is a negative correlation, the size of the correlation is not large. Using the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, Kahneman and Deaton (2010) found a correlation of –0.38 between what they labelled positive affect (the average of reports of happiness, enjoyment and frequent smiling and laughter) and negative affect (the average of worry and sadness). In other words, while the relationship was in the direction that one would expect, there were a number of people who reported both high positive and negative affect.

The second type of wellbeing usually discussed in the literature is life satisfaction or life evaluation. According to Kahneman and Deaton (2010: 16489), life evaluation 'refers to the thoughts that people have about their life when they think about it'. Diener (1994) refers to this aspect of wellbeing as the cognitive part, or the extent to which a person's life measures up to their expectations.

HILDA
Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (survey)

A number of surveys in Australia have asked individuals how satisfied they are with their life. For example, each wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey has had a question on 'How satisfied are you with your

3. <http://www.sf-36.org/>

life?', with respondents asked to rate their life satisfaction on a scale of 0 (totally dissatisfied) to 10 (totally satisfied). According to Wave 8 of the HILDA (undertaken in 2008), the most common (modal) response was 8, with 34.1 per cent of the (weighted) sample. Only 6.2 per cent of the (weighted) sample reported a value of 5 or lower compared to 11.6 per cent who reported a value of 10. Assuming the scale is linear, the mean response in 2008 was 7.9.

Such questions have also been used to measure differences internationally. According to data from the combined World Values Surveys (undertaken between 1995 and 2000 and analysed in Leigh & Wolfers 2006), Australia ranked nineteenth out of 78 countries in terms of life satisfaction, with 13 of the countries ranked higher than Australia having a value significantly different at the 5 per cent level of significance.

While one would expect external characteristics (like employment, income or health) to be associated with wellbeing, according to Kahneman and Krueger (2006: 8–9) 'a person's subjective evaluation of his or her own wellbeing is to a significant extent a personality trait' and 'judgment of life satisfaction is made by combining an imperfect assessment of the balance of affect (that is, positive and negative feelings or emotions) in one's life with an assessment of how well one's life measures up to aspirations and goals'. That is, while there is some correlation between life evaluation and emotional wellbeing, two people with similar levels of emotional wellbeing and socioeconomic status might report very different levels of life satisfaction, depending in part on their expectations.

The effect of expectations on life evaluation is not necessarily a limitation, especially if not meeting one's expectations has the same effect on behaviour as having relatively low levels of objective wellbeing (low income, poor education, etc.). Furthermore, inherent characteristics of individuals can also be controlled for in panel studies by using individual fixed effects (Clark, Frijters & Shields 2008).[4]

Perhaps more problematic than the effect of expectations is the consistent finding that seemingly unrelated events (for example the weather on the day of the interview) can have a large effect on reports of life evaluation. An experimental demonstration of this by Schwarz (1987) is outlined in Kahneman and Krueger (2006). In the Schwarz experiment, subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire on life satisfaction. Before doing so, they were asked to make a photocopy of a sheet of paper with a dime (10-cent piece) placed on the photocopier for a randomly chosen half of the respondents. Those who were in the treatment group had significantly and substantially higher reported life satisfaction than the control group. In many cases,

4. A fixed effect is the average or baseline level of wellbeing for an individual, conditional only on time invariant characteristics. After estimating these fixed effects, the effect of changes in socioeconomic status (or other variables) on changes in wellbeing can be analysed.

the effect of context introduces error rather than bias. As long as the contextual factors vary randomly rather than systematically across population subgroups, there should be no bias in comparative analysis. There will, however, be an increase in uncertainty.

Wellbeing and other outcome measures

While improving subjective wellbeing is an attractive aim of government policy, there are a number of other related concepts that are often used interchangeably. In this section I discuss the similarities and differences between three of these—mental health/illness, capabilities and social inclusion/exclusion.

Mental health/illness

Given the roots of wellbeing research in psychology, it is not surprising that the concept has a strong relationship with mental illness. Indeed, many of the questions on subjective wellbeing in cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys can be found in the mental health modules, especially those on emotional wellbeing and negative affect. There are, however, three crucial differences between subjective wellbeing and mental health measures like depression or anxiety.

The most obvious difference between subjective wellbeing and mental illness measures is that the former 'includes positive measures' rather than simply 'the absence of negative factors, as is true of most measures of mental health' (Diener 2009: 13). Two individuals with no mental health-related diseases could have vastly different levels of wellbeing.

A further difference between negative emotional wellbeing and the narrower definitions of mental illness (especially clinical depression) is that the former includes those who experience short-term feelings of sadness, worry or anxiety in response to external factors. On the other hand, when a person has a depressive disorder, it tends to be long-term, not responsive to changes in objective circumstance and 'it interferes with daily life, normal functioning, and causes pain for both the person with the disorder and those who care about him or her' (NIMH 2008). Someone who becomes unemployed or loses a family member will more than likely have lower levels of emotional wellbeing than previously. This does not, however, mean that they are clinically depressed.

Related to this, the final difference between low levels of subjective emotional wellbeing and mental illness is the policy response. Treatments for mental illness tend to involve medication and psychotherapy (NIMH 2008), with policy designed

to ensure that people who are suffering from depression or other mental illnesses have access to such treatments. These treatments are also likely to improve emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction within a community. However, reducing the causes of low levels of wellbeing (poverty, unemployment, marital breakdown, etc.) will have a greater role.

Capabilities

Capabilities refer to what 'people are able to do or able to be—the opportunity they have to achieve various lifestyles and as a result, the ability to live a good life' (Anand, Hunter & Smith 2005: 10). This is in comparison to functionings or the things that a person actually does or experiences. In essence, a person's capabilities are the set of functionings that they are able to chose from. While there is considerable overlap, the distinction is made clearer by the classic example Amartya Sen uses of two people who are experiencing sustained hunger. The first is hungry because they do not have access to adequate food whereas the second is hungry because they are fasting for spiritual, religious or other reasons. Both have the same functioning (not being adequately nourished), but the second person has the capability to relieve their hunger—they just chose not to.

A number of authors have argued that capabilities, rather than functionings (or other outcome measures) should be the focus of government policy (Nussbaum 2000; Sen 1985; Sen 1999). Recognising a person's own agency, an individual should be able to make their own choice regarding the specific functionings or life that they would like to live. The government's role should be either to maximise the range of choices or capabilities available to each individual, or at the very least ensure that individuals have at least a minimum level of capabilities. Returning to the previous example, the government should be concerned if a person is unable to meet their or their family's dietary needs. However, it should not be concerned with those who have made the conscious choice to fast or reduce their caloric consumption.

One of the more long-standing objections to the capability approach to welfare is the difficulty in measuring an individual's capabilities independent of their functionings. It is relatively straightforward to measure whether or not a person has voted or gone on a holiday (for example). However, it is quite difficult to measure whether they have not done so out of choice or because they have faced some external constraint. The simple response to this criticism is that just because something is hard to measure, that doesn't mean that it should be ignored in policy deliberations. Rather, like the concept of subjective wellbeing, it simply presents a challenge for statistical agencies and researchers to overcome. Furthermore, there has been substantial work on the measurement of capabilities (Anand et al. 2009; Nussbaum 2001; Robeyns 2006) with questions beginning to be integrated into large scale national surveys.

Although the concept of capabilities is in many ways constructed as an alternative to standard outcome measures, there is clearly a relationship between a person's capabilities and their subjective wellbeing. Those with a wide range of choices available to them are likely to report relatively high levels of subjective wellbeing and, in particular, relatively high levels of life satisfaction. On the other hand, those with relatively low capabilities are likely to report low levels of life satisfaction and, potentially, high levels of sadness, worry and anxiety. This was confirmed empirically in Anand, Hunter and Smith (2005).

Social inclusion/exclusion

Where subjective measures of wellbeing focus on the individual (and their happiness, sadness or life satisfaction), social inclusion is concerned with the relationships between individuals. The inverse of social inclusion—social exclusion—focuses on 'inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power' (Berman & Phillips 2000: 330).

While the focus in the social exclusion literature has tended to be on relationships (Sen 2000), a more expansive list of the things that a person can be excluded from includes: 'a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding' (Silver 1995). However, the broad nature of the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion have been heavily criticised by some, for example Oyen (1997).

A further limitation of the concept of social inclusion/exclusion is that it is not clear *a priori* whether higher levels of social interaction always have a positive effect. Too much social interaction or the wrong type of social interaction may have negative consequences (Finch et al. 1989).

Ultimately, the strength of the social exclusion literature may lie in its ability to explain other concepts. This includes subjective wellbeing, but also other concepts like poverty, deprivation and capabilities. Social networks and social participation have intrinsic benefits, but they also help people obtain employment, smooth risk and mitigate the risks of negative affect and mental illness (Finch et al. 1989; Sen 2000).

Implications for Indigenous wellbeing

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, across most socioeconomic indicators, Indigenous Australians have worse outcomes than the non-Indigenous population. This is recognised by all levels of government, with much policy effort devoted to 'overcoming Indigenous disadvantage' (SCRGSP 2009). The current policy framework related to Indigenous Australians endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) revolves around six 'Closing the Gap' targets (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) 2009). These are:

COAG
Council of Australian Governments

FaHCSIA
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

1. Close the life expectancy gap within a generation (that is by 2031).

2. Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018).

3. Ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities within five years (by 2013).

4. Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade (by 2018).

5. Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

6. Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018).

While COAG or the federal government has never made it completely clear what the rationale for choosing these targets are, it would appear that they follow reasonably closely the human development approach outlined by the United Nations Development Programme (2008). This approach itself is based loosely on the capabilities framework developed by Amartya Sen and discussed earlier in this paper. This link between capabilities and Indigenous development is much more explicit in the Cape York Reform Agenda (Cape York Institute for Policy & Leadership 2005), an agenda that has clearly influenced the current (and former) federal government's approach to Indigenous affairs.

Absent from the targets is any measure of wellbeing, despite the fact that the annual report based on these targets has the stated aim of 'assessing improvements in the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians' (FaHCSIA 2009: 7). Although one might assume that meeting the six targets will lead to improvements in Indigenous wellbeing,

this is not necessarily the case. Although health, education and employment have been shown to be associated with both life satisfaction and emotional wellbeing for a number of population groups (Clark, Frijters & Shields 2008), it has not been demonstrated that the link will necessarily hold or be as strong for the Indigenous Australian population.

A second problem with assuming that the COAG targets will necessarily lead to improvements in Indigenous wellbeing is that the way in which the targets are met may have perverse effects. For example, Kahneman and Deaton (2010) showed that graduates have higher levels of life satisfaction than those with relatively low levels of education. However, the authors also showed that those who were married also had higher levels of satisfaction. If one of the ways in which education (or employment) was increased was by encouraging Indigenous Australians to move to major cities then analysis in Biddle and Yap (2010) suggests that education levels may be improved, but this could come at the expense of marriage rates. The positive effects on wellbeing of improving Indigenous education may be counterbalanced by the negative effects of reducing marriage rates.

A third problem with a lack of specific reference to wellbeing in the targets (rather than the rhetoric) is that there is no sense of policy priority. Governments, like individuals, do not have limitless resources, and spending on increasing Year 12 attainment will, for example, need to be done at the expense of spending on reducing child mortality rates. It is unclear in COAG's approach as to how they will allocate resources across the various targets and whether they would be willing to prioritise one over the other. If the targets were explicitly related to improving wellbeing, then this prioritisation could be done based on a more solid evidentiary basis. Related to this, there may be other dimensions (for example housing, safety or community infrastructure) that have a greater effect on wellbeing than the six targets chosen.

The final and perhaps most compelling limitation of COAG's targets (as they relate to wellbeing) is the lack of recognition of distinct notions of Indigenous wellbeing. As outlined in Jordan, Bulloch and Buchanan (2010: 340) 'the targets are focused purely on measuring gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on a predetermined set of mainstream socioeconomic indicators'. There is very little scope for alternative Indigenous approaches to development that emphasise other notions of wellbeing like language maintenance, cultural participation, control/ownership of lands and resource-generating activities outside the economic mainstream (Altman 2005).

The reliance on mainstream notions of economic development would be less of an issue if COAG's targets and broader notions of Indigenous wellbeing were independent. It is true that there would be an opportunity cost from the resources

devoted to these measures, but Indigenous Australians would not necessarily be worse off. However, rather than being independent, there is a distinct possibility that the way in which the targets will be met will have negative impacts on Indigenous notions of wellbeing. For example, in pursuing the COAG targets, there have been a number of changes to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme implemented by COAG and the federal government, with the scheme scheduled to be removed entirely by 2011 (Macklin 2008). There is the strong potential for negative consequences on emotional wellbeing as well as broader notions of Indigenous wellbeing for those who are moved from the CDEP scheme to unemployment and, in different ways, to mainstream employment.

CDEP
Community Development Employment Projects

It may be that the benefits of removing the CDEP scheme outweigh the costs. However, by not fully integrating Indigenous notions of wellbeing into their targets (as opposed to their rhetoric) and without supporting their policy with solid evidence on the role of the CDEP in the lives of Indigenous Australians, COAG has not yet made a convincing argument that its removal will improve rather than impair Indigenous wellbeing.

This lack of recognition of notions of wellbeing specific to Indigenous Australians is in direct contrast to other frameworks of wellbeing which recognise the unique cultural heritage of Indigenous Australians. In their Indigenous Wellbeing Framework, the ABS (2010) recognises that '[e]lements of cultural difference may include, but are not limited to: conceptions of family structure and community obligation, language, obligations to country and continuation of traditional knowledge. This in turn has an affect on the areas of concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples might see as important to their wellbeing.' The framework therefore includes: culture, heritage and leisure; family, kinships and community; citizenship and governance; as well as customary, voluntary and paid work as important domains of wellbeing. These are in addition to, rather than instead of the mainstream notions/determinants of wellbeing like health, education, income and housing.

A second notable component of the ABS's framework is the integration of two levels of analysis—the individual level and the social, cultural and economic environments. So, for example, in the income and economics resources domain, elements at the individual level include savings, assets and income. Elements at the broader environmental level are 'traditional and contemporary economies, community assets, financial institutions and living standards'. A summary of the framework is given in Figure A1 in the appendix to this paper.

The breadth of the ABS's Indigenous Wellbeing Framework does come at a cost. There are around 77 individual-level elements within the framework and a further 82

elements at the environmental level (though there is some overlap). While it is true that, as the ABS states, '[n]o single measure of wellbeing can evaluate an individual's progress over their lifetime or a community's progress over time', the number and breadth of elements included would make it difficult for the framework to be used as a basis for the targeting or evaluation of government policy. Furthermore, it is not clear in the framework which of the elements are measures of wellbeing and which are determinants, nor do all (or even most) of the elements have readily identifiable indicators.

An alternative framework that is a little more concise is that which has been developed for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII 2008). This framework includes indicators on 'actual control of territories, lands and natural resources', 'promotion of Indigenous languages' and 'measures to protect traditional production and subsistence'. Like in the ABS framework, these dimensions or determinants of wellbeing are in addition to rather than in competition with the standard socioeconomic indicators. Once again though, the framework does not contain specific indicators of wellbeing.

Implications for Indigenous research

In 2010, the ABS released information from the 2008 NATSISS. Information was collected from 13,300 Indigenous Australians across a range of topics including personal and household characteristics—geography; language and cultural activities; social networks and support; health and disability; education; employment; financial stress; income; transport; personal safety; and housing. Importantly, there were a number of questions on emotional wellbeing, as well as questions on broader notions of Indigenous wellbeing.

Beginning in October 2010, Commonwealth and State governments funded the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) to undertake a detailed analysis of the NATSISS. This is the first of fourteen papers looking at the distribution and determinants of Indigenous wellbeing. The paper series will be broken into four parts: Part A—Introduction and overview; Part B—Individual measures of wellbeing; Part C—Household and community measures of wellbeing; and Part D—Summary and conclusions. By summarising the available evidence, the ultimate aim of the series is to assist in the design and implementation of Indigenous policy that focuses on improving Indigenous wellbeing, rather than simply reducing the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across a set of mainstream indicators.

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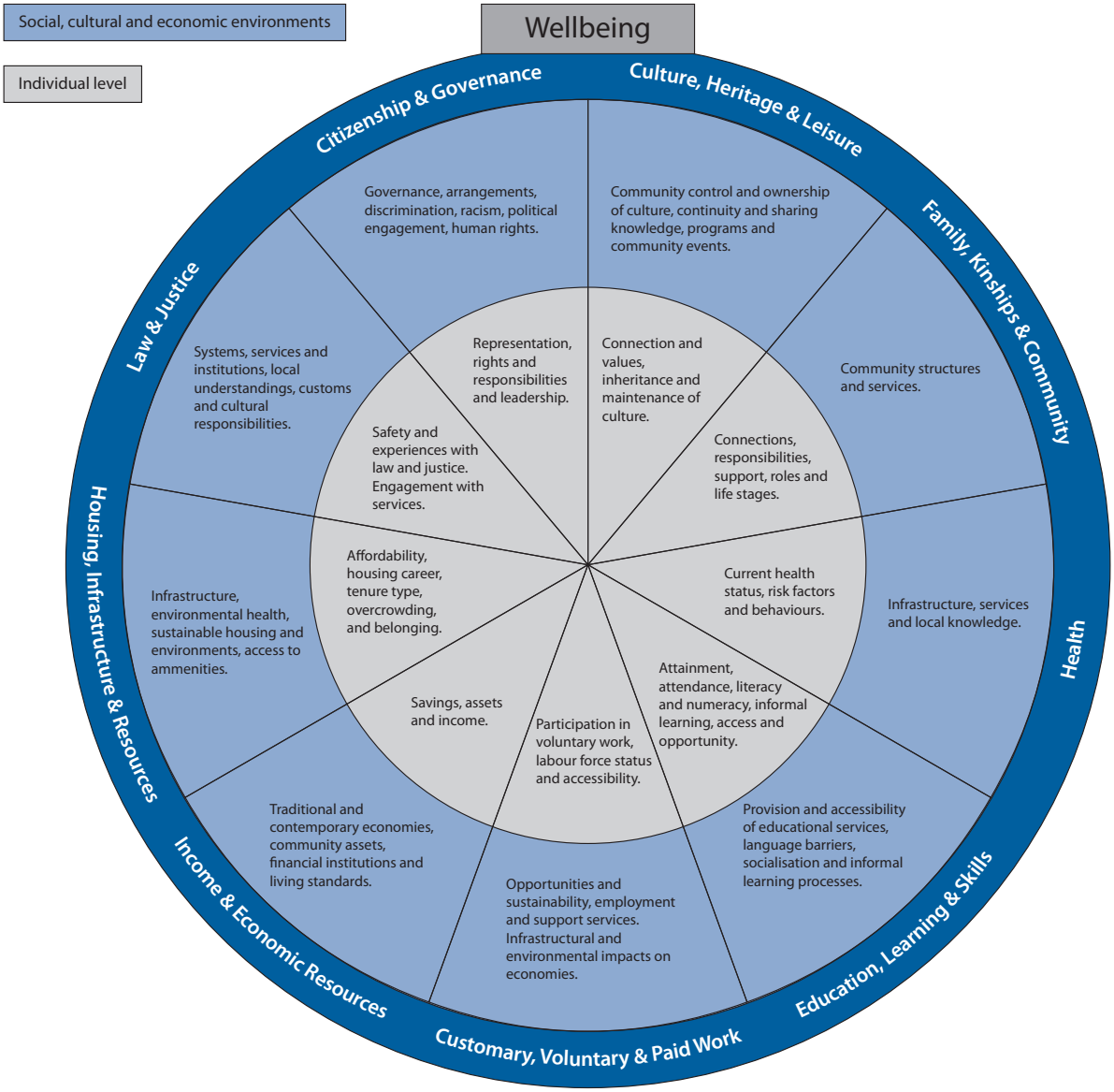
Appendix – ABS Indigenous Wellbeing Framework

Figure A1. Summary of ABS Indigenous Wellbeing Framework



Source: ABS (2010).