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Measuring What Matters  
Social Policy Division  
Treasury  
Langton Crescent  
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Submission online via [measuringwhatmatters@treasury.gov.au](mailto:measuringwhatmatters@treasury.gov.au)

**Re: headspace National submission – Measuring What Matters second consultation process**

headspace National welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the second round of consultation on the Measuring What Matters statement.

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds. headspace has more than 155 centres across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, as well as online and phone support services through eheadspace. Our work builds the mental health literacy of young people and reduces stigma associated with mental health and the associated barriers to seeking help. headspace can help young people with mental health, physical health (including sexual health) alcohol and other drug services, and work and study support. Our work also involves supporting schools and their communities with expert advice and guidance on how to support their communities following major events. At the heart of all our services are young people, their needs and the needs of those who support them.

Attached are headspace National's responses to the five emerging policy themes for the Measuring What Matters Statement.

Our responses highlight:

- The need to broaden the prosperity theme to have greater focus on equity and equitable access to opportunities as part of a growing, productive, and resilient economy. The prosperity theme should not be the first, but rather the final, theme.
- The need to broaden the theme of sustainability to encompass social sustainability, in addition to environmental sustainability.
- The need to perceive 'health' as the promotion of wellbeing rather than the absence of disease or illness, and emphasise the critical importance of mental health.
- The importance of an inclusive society, with opportunities that are available to all people regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or cultural background.
- That while including the voices of all Australians, there is a need to prioritise those of young people, who are the generations that will be impacted into the future of decisions made and actions taken now.

headspace National would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of our submission further and looks forward to the possibility of enhancing our impact and creating more opportunities for young Australians under the Measuring What Matters Statement.

Yours sincerely

**Jason Trethowan**  
Chief Executive Officer

# headspace National submission

## Measuring What Matters Consultation

### About our submission

headspace National appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Measuring What Matters Statement draft themes and descriptors.

As an organisation, headspace places the voices of young people and their families at the centre of everything that we do. This is reflected in the inputs to this feedback, which included:

1. Data from the 2022 headspace National Youth Mental Health Survey. This biennial population-based survey assesses Australian young people's mental health and wellbeing status, help-seeking behaviours, experiences of loneliness, attitudes and experiences related to social media and cyberbullying, and concerns related to climate change. The 2022 survey provides national data from over 3,000 young people.
2. Targeted consultation with young people and their families from the headspace National Youth Reference Group (hYNRG) and Family Reference Group respectively, around the topics for discussion in the Measuring What Matters consultation pack.

The responses below are structured around the key questions outlined in the consultation pack.

### The most important issues for young people and their families

The headspace National Youth Mental Health Survey (headspace Survey; 2022) revealed that young people are particularly worried about major economic and environmental challenges, as well as harmful situations in their own personal lives. When asked about the top three issues that urgently need to be addressed, young people reported:

- **financial instability/cost of living** (48%)
- **housing affordability** (35%)
- **climate change** (34%).

Other top causes of concern were the COVID-19 pandemic (21%), family or domestic violence (20%), sexual violence (20%), homelessness (18%) and online bullying (18%).

These issues are mostly addressed through the themes suggested for the Measuring What Matters Statement, as incorporated in the responses below.

### Did the proposed Measuring What Matters themes resonate with young people and their families?

Overall, headspace National agrees that the draft policy themes are in alignment with the priorities of young people and their families, with the considerations and revisions outlined below.

Generally, the young people and their families we consulted with for this submission found that the themes and descriptions were focussed on economic issues and participation in the economy, which they identified as being only one amongst many factors that are important to their wellbeing. Ideally, the themes and descriptions would have a stronger emphasis on enabling individuals to live their fullest lives in the way that they want, based around their own goals, rather than necessarily focusing on meeting expectations of economic and social participation.

The young people and family members who took part in our consultation acknowledged that the five suggested themes were closely interrelated, and ranked them in the following order (from highest to lowest importance):

1. Healthy

2. Inclusive
3. Sustainable
4. Cohesive
5. Prosperous.

The discussions yielded comments around the five emerging policy themes as reflected below.

## Prosperous

*A growing, productive and resilient economy.*

headspace National strongly advocates for this theme to have a greater focus on **equity** and **equitable access** to opportunities.

Young people are already at increased risk of mental ill health and as costs of living continue to increase, so too do the challenges they face, including impacts on mental health, financial stress and disengagement with work and study. Economic pressure is one of the top 10 perceived reasons for why the mental health of young people in Australia is getting worse over time (headspace Survey 2022). Nationally, vulnerable young people have been disproportionately impacted by cost-of-living pressures – the greatest issue of concern in our national survey.

Findings from the Mission Australia Youth Survey (Leung et al, 2022) echo these findings in relation to cost of living concerns for young people, reporting that 54.8 per cent of survey respondents were concerned about financial security, and 22 per cent listed economic and financial matters as one of the most important issues in Australia today.

Monash University's 2022 Australian Youth Barometer also highlights the rising cost of living and increases in rent or housing prices as barriers to achieving financial security for young people, with 90 per cent of young Australians surveyed experiencing financial difficulties at some point during the past 12 months (Walsh et al., 2022).

Young people and their families engaged in our consultation agreed that the concept of 'prosperity' was appropriate, but that the definition should replace 'growing' with 'stable'. They noted that ongoing drive for growth and encouraging increasing consumerism were negatively affecting young peoples' wellbeing when cost of living is a primary concern. A substantial 84 per cent of young people in the national Youth Mental Health Survey had some level of worry about being able to afford a house in the future. There were also questions around how ongoing pushes for economic growth without due consideration for sustainability of environmental and social factors were contributing to climate change and other socio-political issues.

COVID-19 has also impacted the financial wellbeing of young people, measured by ability to meet everyday commitments, feeling comfortable about their financial situation and resilience to financial shocks. Many young people, however, were already finding it a challenge to secure full-time employment and build their financial security prior to COVID (National Youth Commission of Australia, 2021). Now with the Coronavirus Supplement having ceased, young people are again finding it difficult to meet the costs of job searching including phone, internet and travel costs and it is clear that the pandemic will continue to impact on young people's job prospects, financial security and participation in society in the longer term (National Youth Commission of Australia, 2021).

Noting that the intention is for the themes to be interconnected, rather than ranked in priority, young people and their families remarked on this being the first theme to be included in the list, and all agreed that they would put this theme last in order of importance. They outlined that this theme has strong overlap with existing financial measures and wondered what made 'prosperity' in the Measuring What Matters statement different to the traditional economic measures reported by the Treasury.

## Sustainable

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

### Environmental Sustainability

Young people identified environmental sustainability as a significant concern for them; as the generation who will be most impacted by the effects of climate change, they deserve to be involved in the conversation around how climate change is being addressed. The headspace Survey revealed that half of young people in Australia worry that our country / government is not doing enough to address the issue (50%). A further two in five felt fearful of the future due to the impact of climate change, and indicated they worry that whatever actions they take to address climate change won't really matter (41% each).

Furthermore, the participants in our consultation emphasised that significant efforts should be made to increase their confidence in all governments' commitments to reducing the effects of climate change, and that action requires longitudinal tracking without short term 'band-aid' solutions.

A recent study by Mission Australia and Orygen, conducted with the University of Melbourne, found that one in four Australians aged 15 to 19 were "very or extremely concerned" about climate change, which contributed to harming young people's mental health.

### Social sustainability

headspace National would like to see the theme of sustainability reach further than environmental sustainability to also encompass social sustainability.

In the 2021 Census, nearly a quarter of all people experiencing homelessness (122,494 people) were aged between 12 and 24 years. The headspace Survey found that housing affordability is the second biggest concern for young Australians, after rising cost of living. When asked to describe how worried they were about their ability to one day afford their own home, 71 per cent reported they were fairly worried or very worried, while 61 per cent told headspace they were fairly or very worried about the cost of rent.

From a social sustainability perspective, the headspace Survey also indicated that many young people are also feeling hesitant to have children. The implications for future generations include changing population demographic mixes and economies over time as a result of an ageing population and workforce.

Further, socioeconomic pressures for First Nations and refugee and migrant young people are amplified due to numerous systemic and cultural barriers.

First Nations young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, low income, barriers to securing rental housing, and higher rates of homelessness, due to longstanding socioeconomic disadvantage stemming from colonisation and discrimination. First Nations people are overrepresented in statistics on low-income households, and this is further pronounced in remote areas (Productivity Commission 2020).

A survey by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2014) found 42 per cent of young migrants surveyed experienced some housing insecurity in their first five years in Australia and 47 per cent rated their mental health as okay or poor. Securing employment is often a challenge due to difficulties with skills and qualifications being recognised in Australia and the costs of bridging courses being too prohibitive. Migrant young people are often employed in cash-in-hand jobs and are paid minimum wage. In addition, the Australian Government recently capped the number of hours that foreign students can work to 48 hours per fortnight, to be implemented from 1 July 2023. These factors have significant and long-lasting impacts on daily living, wellbeing and longer-term financial security, including accruing superannuation.

## **Healthy**

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

headspace National believes that a healthy society enables people to thrive, and our vision is young people be supported to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities. Striving for good mental health involves actively maintaining connection and purpose.

The headspace Survey highlighted that two in five young people were struggling with their mental health (39%). Nearly half of young people in Australia were unable to carry out usual activities on at least one day in the past two weeks (44%). Many young people indicated they have a hard time

making it through stressful events (36%); it is hard for them to snap back when something bad happens (33%), and that they tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in their life (31%).

Young people and their families emphasised the importance and interdependency of health on the other themes outlined in the consultation, and the need to perceive 'health' as the promotion of wellbeing rather than the absence of disease or illness. Participants would like to see 'cultural health' added to 'physical' and 'mental' health as part of this definition as these play an important role in a person's holistic wellbeing. They noted that good health is subjective, and the description here doesn't include people living with chronic health conditions.

The measure of health should be framed around each individual's ability to attain a level of mental or physical health that enables them to achieve their personal life goals, rather than measured according to a standardised indicator of what constitutes 'being healthy'.

## **Cohesive**

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

This theme led to specific discussion around the key words of 'safe' and 'culture' in our consultation with young people and their families.

### *Safety*

headspace Youth Reference Group discussions focused on the need for young people and families to feel safe at home, in their community, and online. Emphasising the importance of safety, the headspace Survey demonstrated that family, domestic and sexual violence were issues that were at the forefront of young people's minds. Furthermore, cyberbullying is highly prevalent among Australian young people: six in 10 young Australians reported having experienced some form of cyberbullying in their lifetime (61%).

It is noteworthy that young people reported family, domestic and sexual violence as key issues of concern in our headspace Survey. Recent Australian research (Mathews et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2023) has revealed the prevalence of childhood maltreatment to be 62.2% across the five forms of child maltreatment (domestic violence, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect). Childhood maltreatment is associated with increased rates of health risk behaviours, mental health issues and increased health service use across the lifetime. Nationally consistent initiatives should be undertaken to prevent childhood maltreatment and reduce its impact on wellbeing over a person's lifetime.

### *Culture*

headspace National strongly agrees that a cohesive society celebrates culture and diversity and encourages participation.

Our consultation participants expressed the need to be explicit around the definition of 'culture', which young people identify as broader than just ethnicity or family heritage. They suggested that 'culture' needs to include societal subgroups with recognised ideas, customs and social behaviours, such as the LGBTIQ+ community. Participants also discussed how individuals can identify with one or many distinct cultures, and recognised the disproportionate impacts that intersectionality might have on participation in a cohesive society.

## **Inclusive**

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

Young people and their families engaged in our consultation considered that the wording of the definition should be amended to state "A society that shares opportunities and enables **all** people to fully participate" and noted that opportunities should enable this. Under this theme, they hope to see genuine choice for all people in the areas of education, employment and general life interests, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or cultural background.

Our consultation revealed that young people and their families hope to see a wellbeing-focussed society that is informed by the needs of all of its members - and defined by them, where possible. As such, the importance of including a wide variety of voices in the development of any wellbeing index and metrics against which the indicators will be assessed is critical to the success of the initiative. In particular, headspace National advocates for the voices of young people to be prioritised.

Young people and their families told us that they would like to see more commitment to empowerment, particularly for young people who often feel like their voices are not heard in decisions that affect them or will primarily be theirs to address in the future (such as short-term decisions that have long-term impacts on climate change).

**When it comes to your wellbeing, what do you care about that isn't captured above? What do you think members of your community would like to see represented in the above list that aren't currently captured? What would you replace in the list above to include it?**

During our consultation, several key gaps were identified as important to young people and their families that they would like to see captured in the Measuring What Matters Statement:

- Due consideration for the social determinants of wellbeing, including access to housing and affordable healthcare (including mental health care), financial security, social connection.
- Ensuring equitable and fair distribution of wealth.
- Protecting the rights of First Nations peoples, particularly with respect to land ownership, custodianship, and the impact of failure of rights protections on social and emotional wellbeing.
- Ensuring adequate housing accessibility. Young people in our consultation did not view this as the same as housing affordability but remarked that these terms were perceived as often being used interchangeably.
- Empowerment and elevating the voices of young people, with the ability for everyone to have a say and for their perspectives to be considered in decision making.

*"From listening to my community, and my own experiences, it feels like external barriers are a major issue for people's health and wellbeing. Being able to access and afford to meet their needs, be it financial, physical or mental health, having the time and energy to have hobbies, visit friends and family etc. You can throw yourself into healing, but you can only change things you can control."*

- Young person on our consultation panel

**Is there something that you think you or your community might care about in the future that you are less concerned about right now?**

In the headspace Survey in 2022, when asked about the future, four in five young people were worried about the future in general (83%), with the issues generating the most concern including affordability of buying a home, climate change, and study pressure.

When asked about things that they may care about in the future that they are less concerned about now, young people and their families in our consultation strongly reflected that the impacts of natural disasters and climate change are already a concern and that these concerns would grow as such events increase in frequency in the coming years. Particular points of consideration were climate – change-led displacement of populations, and the need for planning for both the physical and emotional impacts of disasters.

Young people also spoke about future impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies on the workforce and job security, and the need to ensure the considered implementation of strategies to develop new careers that will meet the future work needs in a changing job market.

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