REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO A FRAMEWORK FOR PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND DRIVING WELLBEING OUTCOMES IN NSW

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Thursday 12 September 2024

The Committee met at 9:20 am

PRESENT

Mr Jason Li (Chair)

Ms Jenny Leong
Dr David Saliba

PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Mr Clayton Barr (Deputy Chair)
Mr Michael Regan
Mr Anthony Roberts

The CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. Before we start, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting here at Parliament. I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, of the Eora nation, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present here today or watching the proceedings on the web stream. Welcome to the public inquiry for the Public Accounts Committee into a framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in New South Wales.

I am Jason Yat-Sen Li, the member for Strathfield and Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. With me today are my fellow Committee members, Mr Clayton Barr, the Deputy Chair and the member for Cessnock; Ms Jenny Leong, the member for Newtown; Mr Anthony Roberts, the member for Lave Cove; Mr David Saliba, the member for Fairfield; and Mr Michael Regan, the member for Wakehurst. I thank the witnesses who are appearing before the Committee today and the stakeholders who have made written submissions. We appreciate their input into this inquiry. I declare the hearing open.

Professor PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN, Prevention Research Collaboration, Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined

Professor BEN SMITH, Prevention Research Collaboration, Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney, sworn and examined

Ms BASTIEN WALLACE, People with Disability Australia, affirmed and examined

Dr MATT FISHER, Senior Research Fellow, Stretton Health Equity School of Social Sciences, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms YVONNE POON, Board Member, WalkSydney, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our first set of witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today to give evidence. Can each of you please confirm that you've been issued with the Committee terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

YVONNE POON: Yes.

BASTIEN WALLACE: Yes.

BEN SMITH: Yes.

PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN: Yes.

MATT FISHER: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about that information?

YVONNE POON: No.

BASTIEN WALLACE: No.

BEN SMITH: No.

PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN: No.

MATT FISHER: No.

The CHAIR: Dr Fisher, I note that you are appearing from Adelaide and may not be covered by the New South Wales laws of privilege. Any defamatory statements made may therefore not be privilege. I understand that you've been given that advice and are comfortable to proceed.

MATT FISHER: Yes.

The CHAIR: Would anybody like to make a brief opening statement before we begin questions?

YVONNE POON: Hi, everybody. WalkSydney is a peak body advocating for walking in the Greater Sydney region. Our vision is for walking to be the first choice for short trips. Our three key asks are: 30-kilometre per hour urban default speed limits to achieve Vision Zero; streets that are easy and safe to cross, especially for children; and pedestrian priority over cars, focusing on people, movement and place. Our concerns are that walking and rolling, an activity that every single person does, is becoming harder and harder to choose as a form of movement that should be easy, safe, cheap, healthy and sustainable. I brought this figurine in from home to remind myself of the terror that some of us feel when walking and moving around our cities due to the current outdated focus on motor-centric planning and policy and why WalkSydney does what it does.

WalkSydney welcomes this framework and believes there are simple ways to improve it by focusing more on equitable and sustainable travel for people, rather than infrastructure targets like roads. We urge the Government to drop outdated metrics thinking such as fast transport representing productivity and ignoring health benefits, social connection, environmental sustainability, social equity and affordability as aspects that are important to our community. Walking is free, sustainable and mostly accessible, and as such should be included as a core primary transport mode in policy at all levels for all people without the assumption of costly access to a motor vehicle. Thank you.

BASTIEN WALLACE: I would also like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I would like to acknowledge people here and online who have lived experience of disability. On behalf of People with Disability Australia and the one in five Australians with disability whom I represent, I would like to commend the Hon. Daniel Mookhey, the Hon. Courtney Houssos and the Public Accounts Committee for providing this opportunity to consider measuring performance in terms of

wellbeing, not just money budgeted and spent. Wellbeing objectives need to be applied to all people equally. The 1.7 million people with disability in New South Wales deserve an equitable allocation of resources. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that 22 per cent of people aged over 15 with a disability in Australia have experienced some form of discrimination, compared with 15 per cent of those without disability. Disability discrimination is the largest ground of complaint at Anti-Discrimination NSW and the Human Rights Commission.

If well executed, this wellbeing framework offers an opportunity not just to stop discrimination and bad outcomes, but also identify what achieves good, inclusive outcomes and to pursue that. Our submission identifies the key areas of housing, education, employment, health care, innovation, safety, voting, digital, transport and information sharing. We call for the co-design of measurements with people with disability; the setting of standards for accessibility and resource allocation based on those measurements; the development and implementation of a proactive audit process to evaluate performance against those standards; plans of action then based on those audit results; and regular, transparent publication of results. In this way the New South Wales Government will be better able to deliver the infrastructure, services, supports and opportunities that are most important to everyone.

PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN: First of all, I just want to say thank you very much for the opportunity and the invitation for us to be here. Our work at the university is recognised for our use of high-quality epidemiological evidence. We use population data to monitor, evaluate and track health information to inform government in their planning and decision-making. We work very closely with LHDs, State Government and international organisations such as the World Health Organisation to inform policy and decision-making. I'm very excited that we are here because what we are doing today is very much a game changer. Our work and our organisation have been talking about making sure that we measure health, not just in terms of physical health but also making sure that people are able to experience complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. This framework very much speaks to the definition that we have been using for a long time through WHO. I look forward to speaking to the submission that you will be asking us to clarify today. I will pass on to my colleague to add more.

BEN SMITH: Just to reiterate what PH has said, we are excited and strongly support this initiative to development a performance and wellbeing framework. We see this as an opportunity to focus the attention of government across multiple portfolios on some neglected public health priorities. We've highlighted particularly some factors that concern the wellbeing of older people and the consequences that their wellbeing has in terms of driving demand for hospital services and social care services, and also we've highlighted the significant impact that loneliness and social isolation are having on the population that we're growing, really, a deeper understanding of. We see this as an opportunity to sharpen our focus on these issues. We'll be certainly happy to support the Committee in any future work that it does in terms of developing systems for monitoring these important indicators as a means of observing how we're achieving progress in these important public health areas.

MATT FISHER: I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people and the Kaurna people on the lands where I am, and I thank the Committee for this opportunity. As described in the consultation paper, the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework will define wellbeing as a multifaceted phenomenon, the promotion of which requires multiple and systemic responses across government. This approach is welcome. It avoids the limitations of GDP as a proxy measure of social progress and is well placed to take account of evidence on social determinants of health. However, in order to understand psychological wellbeing and how it can be promoted, an essential accompanying body of evidence and explanation is required. This is an understanding of psychosocial stress and its social and environmental causes. It is exposure to psychosocial stressors in multiple forms which underlies our present epidemic of mental distress and ill health. Such stressors and their impacts on health are already recognised explicitly in the New South Wales Work Health and Safety Act.

Crucially, for this inquiry, an understanding of psychosocial stress and its causes provides a way in to understanding psychological wellbeing and the conditions required to promote it. As I explain in my submission and other work, psychological wellbeing lies in having certain abilities to self-regulate social cognition, behaviour and stress arousal. The realisation that wellbeing requires reduced exposure to social conditions acting as stressors and increased exposure to conditions supporting wellbeing abilities—such conditions include a caring family environment, being socially connected with others, engaging in meaningful work, connection with the natural world and education for lifelong learning. Having a sense of positive expectation about the future is also crucial. The indicators that I propose in my submission are consistent with this broader understanding, and I believe they're also consistent with the framework's proposed core themes and definitions.

The CHAIR: We'll now move to questions from the Committee. Before we begin, I wish to inform the witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing within 14 days after receiving the questions. I just make some introductory remarks. This topic of wellbeing, as

you all know, being experts in the field, is such a big topic. We could really be boiling the ocean with this inquiry. The way that I've been thinking about this is we have a straw person, if you will, in the consultation paper. I thank and congratulate Treasury and the finance Minister's office for producing that piece of work. It would be good to get your specific commentary on that consultation paper and the framework and the indicators and the metrics that are there, what you think is missing, whether you think the indicators are appropriate.

I noticed that, in a number of your submissions, you talk about preventative health. Are the notions of prevention adequately integrated into the framework that is there? Is the balance between lead and lag indicators appropriate? I'm also interested in hearing from you whether you think—I think one of your submissions mentioned this—there are too many indicators and that we should move to a more holistic approach, where there are fewer, integrated, holistic-type lead indicators, whether that would get us further. I'm interested in the witnesses' views on those questions. Who would like to kick us off?

PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN: That's actually one of the key observations that I made when I looked at the framework. I was excited by the framework, but I think there needs to be some redressing the imbalance. I also applaud the Treasury as well for nominating some really exceptional indicators that have been used for quite a while. There's benchmarking there. In our submission, we did notice that there was a gap in terms of measuring the social environment. I noticed that other submissions also alluded to that as well.

We know from evidence, and it's very clear, that the social determinants of environment play a key role in terms of contributing to preventing health outcomes and mitigating risk, so we would like to see that being addressed in terms of providing indicators around measuring—or perceptions of the environment from the residents' perspective, so looking at measuring, whether objectively or in terms of self-report, which is also evidence. It is very clear that self-perception or perception of environment is critical to how people behave and interact with the environment, so measures such as walkability, accessibility to transport or feeling safe walking around at night-time or daytime.

I think those perceptions are critical and should be captured in the framework as well. We're more than happy to provide more additional specific information. But I think that's a gap that was quite evident in the framework and we would like to basically see that gap being filled. There are clear measures that we can recommend in terms of the Government being able to incorporate that into its strategy so that you can track progress in terms of built environment, which would confer a huge amount of benefits in terms of health but also social connection and community cohesion as well.

BEN SMITH: If I might, Chair, add to the comments that PH has made there, you asked some specific questions about the scope of the framework and the nature of the indicators. I feel that it is a significant step forward in terms of recognition of factors that will have contribution to the prevention of disease and physical impairment. That's a big plus. I think there is some scope for some further development without it blowing up to being an enormously overwhelming and potentially less useful document. I feel that the detail and scope of it is shaping up well, and that there is some low-hanging fruit that could probably be grabbed and added in terms of available measures and indicators that can strengthen our understanding about our progress in moving forward with some prevention priorities, as we've outlined in our submission.

The last thing I would say is that we've got a strong focus in public health not just on extension of life but on extension of quality years of life. That means being able to live without impairments that affect a person's social participation, their engagement in a range of different activities and their feelings of wellness, not discounting the critical importance of also creating supportive environments for people who live with lasting impairments. We obviously want to enable that as well. That is something that we've highlighted in our submission that would be a relatively achievable thing that would add some value, in terms of getting a summative picture of the effect of our public health policies and programs.

BASTIEN WALLACE: For us, the issue is less about the indicators that are chosen as much as the need for co-design, because there are such a lot of access issues. People with disability have a range of different disabilities and a range of different needs. The call for co-design and working with people with disability to develop this framework creates that opportunity to take account of the very different needs people have. Even a simple thing like filling out an application for housing, whether a rental tenancy or an application for public housing, is an entirely inaccessible process. There will be plenty of aspects of government service delivery where people are not present to even ask for what they need, because the process of getting there is not accessible.

I think there is a real need in the development of any framework of this type and the nature of the measures to actually do that co-design process with people. For example, I've sat in on meetings related to health issues, and I was informed there still wasn't a COVID-safe strategy for people who are deaf-blind. We have all of these places in society where we have inadvertently or neglectfully created access issues because we haven't listened to the people who would actually be able to inform us. I call out Transport for NSW. They have an

advisory council composed of people with all sorts of disabilities and were able to provide input to inform the way that Transport does its' work. That is a really constructive process, so when we have those opportunities for co-design and to provide that advice, we get better outcomes. It would be really good if that was incorporated here too.

MATT FISHER: Chair, in response to the issues that you've raised, I would say, as alluded to in the consultation paper, just having a set of indicators alone, while valuable, is not enough. The research that I've done on public policy in Australia really, among other things, indicates that government agencies can be disposed to deal with indicators in a mechanical kind of way, one might say, in a way that simply reverts to using the existing policy mechanisms that individual departments have available to them, without really challenging their practices or seeking to think about more systemic approaches. The consultation paper really does allude to this need for a more systemic way of thinking about responses over and above the indicators themselves, and to be thinking about what multiple indicators are telling you. I think that is very important.

One thing that I think is missing in the consultation paper and could be included is a greater recognition of the role of active communities, as might be described in the promotion of wellbeing. It's not all about the actions of government agencies or publicly funded services as such. Active communities have an essential role to play in generating the conditions needed for wellbeing to thrive. I would argue that place-based approaches to policy, whereby governments engage with active communities to develop localised strategies for the promotion of wellbeing have an essential role to play. I would hope that the Committee would take account of that idea in thinking about the kinds of strategies the Government might adopt to progress that and achieve proof in the indicators its developing.

The CHAIR: By active communities, are the sort of measures you are talking about, for instance, numbers of charities or community associations, rates of volunteering? I'm trying to encourage us to get as concrete as possible, as we are trying to shape what this framework looks like. Is that what you are talking about?

MATT FISHER: I would say that active communities have a role in connecting the idea of active communities to the kinds of central conditions that are needed for wellbeing. For example, another member of the panel referred to social isolation. We know that social connectedness and positive social relationships are fundamental to psychological wellbeing. So that is one way in which active communities can be engaged, to understand the importance of that, and with the support of government, find ways within their local area to deal with social connectedness and to combat social isolation.

Similarly, a connection with nature and care for the natural world is unequivocally shown to be very positive for mental health and wellbeing. As I'm sure you would understand, there are many things that local communities can be doing to engage community members in caring for the natural environments within their particular locality or region. Again, we would expect that to be very positive for wellbeing. Finally I would just say the whole area of early child development, positive parenting. Again, there is a role for active communities in really giving priority to healthy child development and doing things, engaging in strategies to support parents with young children and provide those children with developmental opportunities.

YVONNE POON: As per our submission, the themes appear like single agencies. For example, Connected is Transport for NSW. We think that mission-driven, people-centred themes might be a better way to look at things, especially with wellbeing. For example, rather than fast journeys focusing on things like connecting residents to services using affordable, sustainable transport modes, where it is a holistic look at what people need in their lives. Things like schoolchildren-centred missions, which include school attendance, school standards and better place planning around schools. For example, at the moment there is a gap in how we achieve better walking for schoolchildren to get to school, because they are not funded by the Education portfolio but then also not really in the Transport portfolio, so there is this gap where active transport to school has to fight against a freeway/cycleway project, when they are not necessarily trying to—I guess it's a different kind of mission that we need to really think about. Both a priority in different ways.

The CHAIR: We may well come back to you. I'm really interested, in my mind, about how do we get this sort of hierarchy between lead and lag indicators. How do we go from the more holistic ones that are probably a lot more lead and how they have impact on the lag indicators. Social isolation is really a lag indicator. If we do have more active communities, however we measure that, and if we have more holistic approaches, how is that going to run down through to the lag indicators, where there is more operational data around these things? I'd be really interested—afterwards, maybe, as follow-up supplementary questions—in your views around how we structure a set of metrics in a hierarchy or in that sort of framework.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you all so much. I'm sitting here sort of pinching myself that we're at this point in the conversation. Even though we are now nutting down on the detail, it's a pretty exciting space to be in. I know that the first time we put forward the idea of a wellbeing budget it was covered in the conservative press

as being "completely wacko Greens", and now it's great to see that the Government is moving forward on this approach. I guess I have two points in question around where we're at, and I think there's lots of detail that we need to drill into.

The first is around—and I think we touched on it then, Ms Poon, with your response to the Chair—the risk that we end up with these indicators and the areas further siloing into what are the areas of government rather than looking at what works for peoples' lives. What would your advice be to how we ensure the intersection between these things? Particularly, how do we address that in relation to things that are seen as responsibilities of other areas of government? If we look at the current debate happening federally around misinformation in online spaces, we know that online viciousness and trolling is a huge cause of stressors and yet the State Government would probably say that's not the remit of the State Government—but the people living in New South Wales are obviously on digital devices. The intersection between different portfolios with the State Government but also Federal work—I'm keen to hear your thoughts on how that would be addressed.

The second one is, taking a big step back, whose wellbeing we're looking at. I'm really conscious that so many of our State government services at the moment are only available to citizens of New South Wales. Do you have thoughts or input on whose wellbeing we should be measuring? Is it just voters, or are we actually talking about all people that live in the State? Any thoughts you have on either of those two. Maybe we'll go to Dr Fisher first and then hear from the others. Don't feel like you need to answer all of that. Feel free to jump in on either of those, but they're the two that I'm keen to drill down in.

MATT FISHER: I would agree that there is a risk of indicators going into different government agency silos, and those agencies feeling responsible for certain kinds of indicators and using the mechanisms that they have available to them to try and progress those. For example, if rates of high-prevalence forms of mental health disorders was selected as an indicator, health agencies now overwhelmingly address that issue as one of access to mental healthcare services. I'm certainly not opposed to such access, but that leaves out a whole realm of activity around the promotion of psychological wellbeing. Such activity, as you suggest, requires thinking across the whole of government. It requires thinking about social determinants of mental health and wellbeing and a shift from an illness focus to a wellbeing focus. I think there needs to be consideration of some kinds of mechanisms to encourage more systemic thinking.

On the role of active communities and place-based approaches, I think, by their nature, these kinds of approaches have the ability to encourage and facilitate more systemic kinds of approaches. Through the concept of a wellbeing community, whereby multiple dimensions of wellbeing are seen to be incorporated in that concept, government agencies can then see that their responsibility to contribute to wellbeing communities can happen through the mechanisms that they have available. Local primary schools can contribute to community wellbeing. Local primary healthcare services can contribute to community wellbeing through engagement with community members—and so on. Again, I would encourage the Committee to be thinking about place-based approaches in that sense.

BEN SMITH: To the risk of siloing the future work, that will always be there, I think. It's a very beneficial thing that this initiative is coming from Treasury so that it does reflect the Government perspective on these priorities. It's also very encouraging that we're seeing, for instance from a Health perspective, a number of indicators appearing under themes like "Connected" and so forth. We're seeing the breadth of indicators under other public policy priorities, which is a good sign. There will always be critical questions around governance organisational funding that will need to be nutted out in terms of the future action that's taken from this framework. I just would want to highlight that we have a history in this country of preparing beautiful frameworks and strategies which don't get implemented to achieve their potential because of the hard thinking that needs to go around governance, organisation and funding. It's not always necessarily new funding. It's about allocation of funding appropriately across portfolios.

PHILAYRATH PHONGSAVAN: Thank you, Ben. There are many amazing international care studies that looked at, say, Bogotá city, New York, Ottawa and Hong Kong where they've actually done some really amazing work looking at the evidence around activating places, creating walkable environments and then looking at whether or not that leads to better social interactions between individuals and the community, and whether or not that leads to improved functions among older people as well. There is strong, clear evidence that activating places—making streets connected better, creating destinations for people to walk to within 10 minutes or 15 minutes—really gets people up and about and also connecting with their community and society. We've got some amazing evidence that has been published out there to showcase that it does work. Going back to my earlier point and comment about, basically, making sure that the framework acknowledges the indicators and measuring walkability, activity and places, that's going to be critical.

These are examples of lead indicators because it does address that upstream social determinants of health. We know for certain that up to 50 per cent of health issues can be prevented if we actually address the environment. That's important. Social connection and social cohesion will come through addressing social isolation and loneliness as well. We've got clear data. We've got clear indicators that we can actually build in to measure that, and then linking it to whether or not activity in places can actually result in downstream indicators, like people feeling less lonely or people feeling more socially connected, as well. I think we can address those by looking at indicators that can measure walkability and activity in places and then linking it to more downstream individual-level indicators like perceptions of social isolation and loneliness.

BASTIEN WALLACE: From the perspective of people with disability, I think what needs to happen—because Treasury is about resource allocation, we're having a wellbeing framework to also help us with resource allocation so that we get the most wellbeing out of the public resources being expended. I think there's a real need for, obviously, consultation with people with disability around how that works, but also just systematic listening. Government has been very good at telling. Government now has, in our digital age, so many opportunities to do more listening. I'm not saying that every single department is going to get it right all the time, but actually listening and—whether it is people with disability, experts and people from the community—taking that time to actually listen to how something lands. Listen early, listen often; and then, if you need to pivot and change, you can do so before we get entrenched problems that go on for too long. There's a huge piece around how we engage with people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of these service and how we systematically listen to people. We've got all of these voting and social media tools that are used in other aspects of life and yet not really to the full extent they could be in government. There is that opportunity.

You asked about the separation between portfolios. Yes, that's how government has to organise itself around expertise and the various ways that it operates. But, obviously, people's lives are organised in different ways. I think if we do a bit more listening, then people can say, "Yes, education is my critical issue, but if I can't get there, transport is also my barrier. So I've got secondary issues and, yes, they cross portfolios and they're going to have to get mended."

You asked who wellbeing measures ought to apply to. I think that is everybody. Yes, we have preferenced and perhaps always prioritised citizens, but so many people come here for all sorts of different reasons—as students, as migrants, as workers. I think that we have to ensure that wellbeing applies to everybody. Otherwise, how are we going to look after, attract and have people enjoy coming here, staying here and living the lives that they need to live, which all of us benefit from? The notion of wellbeing can't be exclusively to adult citizens who are paying their taxes. We've got children, elders and all sorts of people who really ought to be considered as well.

YVONNE POON: I support what Bastien said about supporting everyone. We all live in this community together and impact each other. I think having a strong wellbeing is good for the community. I want to make reference to the fact that we also wrote a submission to the National Urban Policy, which aligns with a lot of the wellbeing indicators.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I've read all your papers. Thank you so much for all your contributions in that space. I've got very quick questions for each paper. I've picked out themes to highlight. Firstly, Professors, thank you so much for your work in this space. I know that you've sought to add some indicators within the community theme. I want to talk about social isolation and loneliness. I recall a week or two ago I read a report about one in four people being lonely. I think that's a very important indicator. Would you like to share some comments about that?

BEN SMITH: That's something that we're seeing consistently across a number of different population surveys. The remarkable thing to me, as somebody who has moved into this area in the last five years or so, is how consistently and strongly related loneliness is to mental health and to engagement with services. We're seeing signs of it being related to workplace engagement and productivity, after adjusting even for depression. As somebody who has dealt with data for a long time, it surprises me how strong the relationships are, consistently. I think it is something that we do need to get more serious about. We do see some countries really moving forward in this. It would be good if, in Australia and New South Wales, we were able to do the same.

To add to that, we think about loneliness in terms of being episodic but also persistent. We're particularly concerned about those segments of the population who are experiencing persistent loneliness, people with chronic conditions and also people living in financial stress. A recent study that we did showed that people who were living in financial stress had seven times the likelihood of loneliness, after adjusting for a number of other factors. So it's strongly related to people's stressors and living conditions as well.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I think it's very important in that space. Ms Wallace, I read one of your recommendations and I thought it was very important, pertaining to digital inclusion. You've got this digital space

and both access and literacy are very important. Do you have any commentary about that with respect to wellbeing?

BASTIEN WALLACE: Absolutely. We're moving increasingly to a digital world. But across our State, whether you have disability or not, there are so many people who can't get access because there is no internet signals or connectivity in their area. They've got blackspots and we found that acutely during COVID. We have people who can't access because they don't have the income that it takes to buy all the right devices, keep them connected and pay for plans. We have accessibility issues because the nature, for example, of someone's disability is that digital just might not work very well for them, whether it's the nature of the technology or just the interface, or there has not been the level of education that they need to use all of that technology.

In terms of people's wellbeing, to access a health service or even to enrol in a lot of doctors' surgeries, to do your first enrolment is digital. For all the people who can't access digital, whatever the reason for that barrier is, they can't get access to their GP. We then put out health information and all sorts of advice, including advice about things that are laws which, if people break them, they're going get in trouble, and we do it all digital first. For the people who can't access, they don't even necessarily know to go looking to ring someone up, if we didn't actually think about how they were going to get the information. It is all aspects of wellbeing.

For People with Disability Australia, we take a "housing first" approach. I challenge any member in this room to take the housing form, take one of your assistants, have them sit next to you, you blindfold yourself and get someone to walk you through that form verbally. That might start to show you how complicated and exclusionary interacting with government can be, because the processes are needlessly complicated. Then, if you tried to do any of the government processes on your phone—you try to attach a PDF, which is often the evidence that you need to substantiate something you're asking for or to avoid getting in trouble.

Whether it's the Federal Government or the State Government, people keep forgetting that people don't have the same level of digital access. They don't have the same level of digital equipment and they don't have the same level of digital literacy. All of those things need to be deeply examined. Every time a government department thinks of taking away the phone line, don't. Every time they think of a digital-first strategy that then places obligations on people—if you don't plan how you are going to communicate to people for whom the digital-first approach doesn't work, you've excluded people and, potentially, people are going to start to get in trouble because they can't follow your instructions. That really needs to be re-examined very carefully. We prepared and submitted a submission on the digital inclusion and digital ID strategies as well. It's an acute area for people with disability.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: It's very important for them and, yes, I'm very familiar with the housing forms. We get around 20 to 30 families a week come to the electorate office seeking assistance. I'm acutely aware.

BASTIEN WALLACE: They're so tough.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Dr Fisher, thanks very much for your very comprehensive submission. Could you give me a bottom line up-front? There is table 1 and reducing negative exposures, and table 2 and increasing positive exposures, and then the government measurement metrics. What's your main synopsis there?

MATT FISHER: I would say that in order to promote wellbeing in current social conditions, we need to do things across those three dimensions. Reducing exposure to current conditions likely to cause chronic stress is very important—just as one example, poverty or social isolation. In that sense, we're trying to reduce exposure to negative factors. However, for the purposes of wellbeing, it's important and crucial to realise that the promotion of positive wellbeing is not just about the reduction of those exposures to negative factors. It's also access and exposure to social conditions that assist with promoting a positive wellbeing. They're slightly different challenges. Obviously, they're complementary. That's the reason why I've separated them in that way and tried to propose indicators that relate to those two challenges. Table 3, about indicators around assessing government agency performance on wellbeing, is really speaking to the question of how these indicators get translated into action and how government holds itself accountable to work to progress these indicators for wellbeing.

I've suggested that one of those is about measuring the extent to which government agencies are engaged in place-based wellbeing community strategies. The other one which I think is worth considering is the proportion of total government expenditures on health and social policy dedicated to primary promotion of health and wellbeing, because we know that, for example, in the Health portfolio typically around about 90 to 95 per cent of current expenditure goes on remedial responses to ill health after it has already happened, and only a small percentage around 5 per cent or less gets assigned to promotion of health and wellbeing. I think that that ratio has to change in order to make progress on wellbeing indicators.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I do have a question for Ms Poon about connected. I'm going through this, and I'm just a layperson looking at this, and I can imagine—it's just a comment as opposed to a question—government

agencies being able to track all this. Do we go extremely exhaustive or do we simplify—I think the point you mentioned before—just to ensure that there's readily accurate reporting?

The CHAIR: For me, it's both. In my mind—and I'm no expert at this; I defer to the experts—there are a smaller number of holistic, integrated cross-departmental lead as possible metrics. Then that cascades into a whole lot of much more detailed, granular and probably lagged things where the data feeds up from each of the government departments—customer service, the health department, education et cetera. You've got a pyramid, but at the top you've got a limited number, probably only five, of these integrated, holistic things. To get progress on those, to Jenny's point, you've got to have everybody working together. Unless people are working together, you're not going to get that holistic, integrated approach. So I think it's both. That basically is my sense.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I read your paper as well, the theme of connected and obviously all the sub-points attached to that. Does any of that stand out there? Obviously there are heaps of data coming through. What really stands out for you?

YVONNE POON: I guess children—focusing on children. I think there are a lot of aspects there, especially transport for children, that are dealt with as transport rather than services for people to access locally. It really starts from what people need rather than what bus is there, with the really granular thing. I think having those missions will help people remember what they're doing it for and not lose sight of the real goal of what we're trying to achieve, rather than focusing on—you can have the detailed, granular metrics but at the top is that we want kids to be okay in going to school every day.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I do have a very quick point. I 100 per cent agree with you in terms of connected and in terms of active transport, that sort of stuff. I represent a Western Sydney seat. I grapple with how I go about it when we have a significantly high number of people with disabilities and a cost-of-living crisis, with respect to people being able to afford to be geographically mobile. I do ponder those questions, particularly in Western Sydney. I do see a reliance on cars, given the fact that transport here versus there—there is a bit of variance in terms of that connectedness. I do note your points here, sincerely.

YVONNE POON: I also want to state that there seems to be a myth that people with disabilities don't participate in active travel and only drive.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: No, they do.

YVONNE POON: I think that there's a lot of data to support that active travel is actually a solution for a lot of people with disabilities. It would be great for the New South Wales Government to lead in that space and normalise active transport and include it a little bit more in their communications.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I do train station stalls, and I get hit up by that question, "What measures are you doing for active transport?" It is an important thing out in my way too.

YVONNE POON: It's cheap!

The CHAIR: Are there any other questions from committee members? There's a lot more; I'm just conscious of time. As I said, there will be an opportunity for us to come to you with some supplementary questions. I've got a whole lot in my head already. Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. You will each be provided with a copy of the transcript from today's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email you any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these within 14 days. Thank you all very much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms ZOË ROBINSON, Advocate for Children and Young People, Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, affirmed and examined

Ms SCARLETT SMOUT, Research Associate, The Mentally Healthy Futures Project and the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, affirmed and examined

Dr MARLEE BOWER, Research Fellow, The Mentally Healthy Futures Project and the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, affirmed and examined

Miss ESTELLE GRECH, Policy Manager, Fairness and Equity, Committee for Sydney, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I would like to welcome our next witnesses. Thank you all very much for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee today to give evidence. Can each of you please confirm that you have been issued with the Committee's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes.

SCARLETT SMOUT: Yes.

MARLEE BOWER: Yes.

ZOË ROBINSON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about this information?

ESTELLE GRECH: No.

SCARLETT SMOUT: No.

MARLEE BOWER: No.

ZOË ROBINSON: No.

The CHAIR: Would anybody like to make a brief opening statement before we begin the questions?

SCARLETT SMOUT: We're here on behalf of the Mentally Healthy Futures Project, which is housed at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney. Our project explores meaningful wellbeing metrics in policy, whole-of-government policy action in mental health and meaningful youth participation. While the framework's healthy indicator states that a "healthy NSW means a society where people have good physical and mental health", mental health is only considered with regard to hospital readmission within a 28-day period, and no mention or consideration of population mental health is considered among the proposed wellbeing outcomes.

Mental ill health is a pervasive issue in the Australian population, and New South Wales is no exception, with the recent National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing finding that in New South Wales an estimated two in five adults, or 2.5 million people, have experienced a mental disorder. Younger adults aged 16 to 24 years have much higher rates of disorders than older adults, indicating a substantial threat to New South Wales' future wellbeing. These statistics highlight that mental health should be a core tenet of any wellbeing framework and monitoring. Further, they suggest a need for a population-level metric, compared to the sole existing measure that is proposed.

Hospital admission represents only the most severe mental health issues. Our submission asserts that a short general measure of mental health, such as psychological distress, as well as a measure of subjective wellbeing should be added to the "Healthy" metrics and that one or ideally both of these measures should be considered in the final wellbeing outcomes. In addition, it's crucial that the framework is culturally appropriate and incorporates measurement of the First Nations concept of social and emotional wellbeing.

MARLEE BOWER: If I could just add on one little thing, our submission also highlights the importance of meaningful consultation, especially with young people aged 16 to 24. Our project includes a Youth Mental Health Advisory Team, self-named, with whom we've co-developed the world's first evidence-based guidelines, which draw on the evidence of 72 global studies on youth participation, including over 69,000 young people internationally. It shows how youth participation should be designed and implemented to maximise participant wellbeing, because we know that when it is not done well it can harm the young people involved. These guidelines will be published in *The Medical Journal of Australia* in November, but we can share an embargoed copy if that's of interest to the Committee. We have also engaged several members of this advisory

team to get their perspective on the proposed consultation document. That's outlined in our submission, but we won't go into that now.

ESTELLE GRECH: I have a quick summary. I'm here on behalf of the Committee for Sydney. We're an urban policy think tank. Our mission is to make Sydney the best city in the world, and we strongly support a wellbeing budget framework. Without a framework that anchors budgeting and decision-making to the community's wellbeing over time, we are at risk of trading the wellbeing of future generations to satisfy short-term wants. The draft framework is a really good start, but to have real impact and to have teeth and to actually make change, we think there are three key improvements that need to be made. These are outlined in our submission in greater depth. But to summarise in a minute, less is going to be more. Our advice is to replace things with a manageable number of overarching outcomes. Too many outcomes will dilute focus and old departmental habits will prevail. The framework has to be specific enough so that you're actually driving real change and you're not just retrofitting decisions that were going to be made anyway within the framework. Another benefit of trimming the outcomes down is that they're likely to become more interdisciplinary and cut across multiple departments. That's how you get greater impact.

The second point is it's really important to adopt an equity approach. The consultation document outlined why you take an equity approach, but then it kind of said, "But we're going to go for New South Wales-wide measures anyway." I think that's the wrong approach, and it also means that you're not necessarily tracking if impact is being made where it needs to be made. We know that Scotland's framework, for example, breaks down indicators by age, gender, socio-economic status and more, depending on the outcome. That's how you get real insight into whether government investment is actually making change. The third point is linked to that, but it's also about documenting indicators spatially. This will help State and local governments identify areas that need targeted policy investment. It will also help local government understand where and what the priorities are in their areas. Those are the three points that I'm keen to discuss more today. Thanks for having us.

ZOË ROBINSON: I'm happy for questions.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Before we begin the questions, I inform the witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing within 14 days after receiving the questions. I might go straight to Mr Roberts, given that he missed out last time.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Thank you, Chair. Ms Grech, I totally and wholeheartedly agree with you that less is often more in cases like this. Congratulations, and thank you for that insight. Would you mind outlining how it works in other jurisdictions? In particular, you mentioned Scotland.

ESTELLE GRECH: I might go first to New Zealand, if that's okay? They only have five priorities: transition to a sustainable and low emissions economy, social and economic opportunities, lifting Māori and Pacific people's opportunities, reducing child poverty, and improving mental health. I think, when you have five priorities, it means that if you're the transport Minister you need to think about what you are doing to reduce child poverty. It might not be your everyday thing that you have to think about, but just having five to remember is way more likely to mean that you're actually addressing what the government's priorities are. It's not another jurisdiction, but it is a past government—I think the Premier's Priorities were another interesting, good example, of the Berejiklian and Baird governments. There is a lot to learn around what went wrong, but there were focused priorities, and I witnessed the power of them to really funnel attention across departments. For example, one million trees—sure, it should have been one million net trees planted.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: That was me.

ESTELLE GRECH: It meant that, for example, Transport had to think about how it was dealing with trees and road projects and things like that. In terms of Scotland, I'll have to take it on notice exactly, but from memory there are 10 or 11 key things. Again, it's really about focusing what the Government's priorities are and making sure everyone can remember and focus on them, whereas I think the proposed—there are themes and then 28 outcomes. No-one is going to be able to remember that. They're not going to be able a focus a decision being made differently to how they're made today.

ZOË ROBINSON: Perhaps if I could add to that. Obviously, it is very much in a wonderful government language, whereas the people of New South Wales, and certainly when you're speaking about children and young people—and I refer you to *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024*—they talk about things like "Hope for the future" and "Environments for joy and fun". And so, making sure that it is reflective of what people understand those things to be, as well, is incredibly important. I think the wonderful thing about Scotland as an example is, as you said, Transport has to think about its impact in terms of poverty and the impact on children and young people—as an example, making sure that people are thinking not just about who exists currently but future generations. That's the kind of thing.

The other thing I'd say, as I look at this, is we welcome a wellbeing framework. Children and young people don't often think in terms of a budget or a profit or what other KPIs are measurable. They do think about their community and who they're socialising with. One of the big things with a framework like this is the enablers. If we're talking about children and young people being able to feel like their wellbeing is good because they're engaging with their community, that looks like a variety of things, and that means we also have to talk about transport and we also have to talk about activities and access to activities and making sure they have those things. And, perhaps controversially in a time like now, if we are going to ban social media, as an example, for young people, that will impact in a different way in terms of their access to communities. The framework and the outcomes are great in terms of that, but we also have to really consider, as a government, the deliverables and the enablers to make sure people are meeting their wellbeing and have access to those outcomes and what those positive outcomes are for them.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you so much for that. I really appreciate the contributions that have been made. There is very much a concern that I have around the idea that we end up seeing individual government departments having KPIs around this when we know full well that the indicators of stress and the causes of stress and harm are actually as a result of the siloed levels of government to people. There are many examples of that— public housing being perhaps the most acute. I wonder how you would go about, and what your main indicators would be, to take on from Ms Grech's point, around the New Zealand model? What would you identify as some of the intersecting measures that could be looked at?

The other part, and apologies to my Committee members, because I'm going to keep asking it all day, is particularly about the Committee for Sydney wanting to make Sydney is the best city in the world. We are a global city. We have a lot of people living in our city that are not citizens. Unfortunately, some of our services are only provided to people who have the right kind of passport. How do you see the State Government having a role to play in wellbeing indicators beyond those who happen to have the right-coloured passport?

ZOË ROBINSON: Obviously, we have the six indicators that children and young people have come up with. I think that language is important in terms of the measurement. Certainly, when we are talking about wellbeing, if you look at some of the top issues for children and young people that has come out of our polling, if you start to address things like mental health and wellbeing, you probably will start to alleviate some of the other things that are actually—you know, there is talk about unemployment, bullying, social and wellbeing pressure to meet the societal expectations. So there are ways to tackle a problem by listening to the central issue that perhaps is leading to those things.

As we know, cost of living impacts on mental health and wellbeing. School stress impacts on mental health and wellbeing. There is ways to make sure that governments as a whole, when they are thinking about it— as you say, it doesn't need to be complex. But how are you actually making sure that you are—perhaps I'm simple in saying this. We serve the people of New South Wales, so we should be making sure that all of the people of New South Wales, be it those who are citizens, or with different passports, are meeting the outcomes that mean that their wellbeing is being met.

As departments, we don't just own one department. We actually serve all people in New South Wales. That means we need to be thinking about how we can meet that standard. To add to that, we are actually doing in our office a beautiful piece of work with young refugees and migrants. One of the things I asked them yesterday was, "What does this mean to you?" They talked about their physical and their mental but also their spiritual wellbeing. They talked about how important their culture and identity is to that and the lens of making sure that we are including all people with all experiences. Whilst that seems complex and hard, the ways to do it are to sit with communities. There's great work that's done that's being collated in many places. But sitting with communities and understanding what that means—not policy that is already designed, but policy that is reflective of sitting with those communities, and language that is reflective of that, I think is a place to start, absolutely.

MARLEE BOWER: I would add to that and say that our research has covered lots of different things, but one of the areas is housing and housing instability for renters. We've found that renters do tend to have much worse mental health than any other group. It is often less than public housing. That is because of the precarity that renting puts on lives, and the lack of control it puts on people's capacity to make changes to their home to make it more liveable and safe. My argument would be that having mental health as an outcome measure would have the power to show changes in policy and impacts to wellbeing.

You don't need to measure other kinds of intermediary sections, because it will pick up any changes. If you do have that kind of approach where you don't just do aggregated wellbeing outcomes but also on a population level, particularly looking at renters versus people in social housing, you will be able to see the changes that policy changes that the Rental Commissioner puts forward has on mental health, through understanding things like psych distress or general wellbeing.

Some of our work looks at how mental health really should be everyone's business, not just those in the Health portfolio. That's where you see treatment, and the pointy end of where things land. But housing, urban planning, education—they also have a mandate for mental health. Linking the work of particular Ministers or departments with mental health outcomes would be fantastic for government transparency and also seeing the real-life implications of policymaking on the wellbeing of New South Wales citizens.

ZOË ROBINSON: Because I don't want to miss the opportunity on this, I think it's great to have a framework. One of the things I particularly like about this framework is the callout for our vulnerable children and young people. There is work that we need to understand—for example, what does justice look like for a young person who is intersecting with justice versus what does it look like for a community who wants a response to some particular issues?

I think there is wonderful complexity in that, which means we will be having conversations in different ways to really understand what that means. When you're talking about children in care—obviously acknowledging the special inquiry we just did, that ability for them to be called out and us to be held to account, to make sure that all people, particularly in vulnerable situations, are still meeting an outcome that is a good outcome for them. But we still have to understand that complexity, because you can ensure that people have access to justice and protection under the law, but how do you do that in ensuring that Legal Aid, ALS and all of that still have the funding to provide that, if that is the appropriate service for them? I do want to call out the fact that it's good to see particular cohorts called out in the framework.

ESTELLE GRECH: I'm not going to be able to give you a list of all the indicators we think should be in there today. But I can maybe provide that on notice. I'll give an example of what you said around it depending on your passport and so on. One of the outcomes currently is "Quality housing solutions are sufficient and affordable". This is on page 32 of the consultation paper. The indicator is "New potential dwellings unlocked through rezonings". The metric is "Number of dwellings approved". The problem with those indicators and metrics is that it's not really talking to the outcome.

This goes to what data are we using for the indicators? Is it just quantitative, or should we get qualitative instead? What are renters' experiences of housing? What are social housing tenants' experiences of housing? What are the experiences of people who own their home? How does that change their other health and wellbeing outcomes? It is complex, so it's difficult to do, and I know I said less is more. Less outcomes is more, but then getting more reach in terms of the indicators and metrics you use will be able to tell us so much more about where we need to invest, what the priorities are and what policy solutions we need to come up with in response to cohorts that aren't doing as well as others.

MARLEE BOWER: There is a gap, though, in this. Scarlett and I were really lucky; we went for a trip early in the year to understand how wellbeing metrics are used in other countries, what's done well and what's done very well. We learnt that even in the best—in Wales, where they have the future generations Act and commissioner and they have incredible amounts of mandated power in that position to ask and request different departments to act in the service of future generations of Welsh young people of the future, there still is this kind of cloudy or murky understanding of how we can measure policy implications on wellbeing. How can you actually isolate the impact of policy on wellbeing?

I don't know if you want to talk to the work we are trying to do in that, but I think that is sometimes beside the point. You don't need to understand this particular rental property or change to rental tenancy laws and does it have a meaningful estimable impact on mental health changes. It is more if you, and the policy does and your consultation does infer this—are the changes that the Government is bringing forward together in aggregate having a general positive impact on wellbeing and mental health. That is kind of more important than anything else, rather than having to really highlight that kind of hard to estimate difference.

SCARLETT SMOUT: I was thinking about our work with the Welsh changemakers in that space, which was hugely inspiring. One of the key learnings I think that came out of all of that work with them is that one piece of the puzzle is getting this excellent framework with a streamlined set of outcomes that has really cross-governmental implications. Then another massive piece that Wales have done a huge amount of work in is that culture change—so, across government, upskilling on how to recognise an opportunity to impact mental health through a change in transport. That is not necessarily something that kind of comes instinctively, especially when you've been in a KPI-driven environment that is so focused on times on a train and that is your key metric. It might not come naturally, and it shouldn't be expected to come naturally, that you would then think about the flow-on effects on mental health. Another piece of the puzzle, once a set of outcomes and indicators are aligned on, is that culture change piece. And I'm not an expert on the Welsh work, but there is some information available publicly on their culture change project that they've done.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Are you happy to take that on notice and share that with us?

SCARLETT SMOUT: Of course.

ZOË ROBINSON: It's probably also worth noting that there has been, for a very long period of time, a very good framework that exists, which is the rights frameworks that exist globally. We've got the UN charter on the rights of the child. They all talk to things like housing and education and your wellbeing and your family connection. Frameworks are great. I would suggest that we should probably remind a number of people that we do have and we are signatories to many of the human rights frameworks, as an example. It's more that I would suggest for the benefit of children and young people how do you enable us to access those rights, how are you making sure that, as adults, you are consistently upholding our rights and ensuring that we have access to them, as well. I think that balance means that you can have things like this. And, again, I think it is a good thing, but we still have to have those steps that make sure people know that we can hold people to account for these outcomes and this wellbeing framework.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Indeed. Let's get the rental reform, then. I'll bring that project on next year.

The CHAIR: Could I ask maybe a follow-up question to that. A number of the other submissions have talked about bringing the community with us on this journey, that really this requires a co-design, requires a really, really clear purpose and it requires a comprehensive community co-design sort of process. In what you saw, do you have any insights as to how to do that without it taking years and years? Obviously, this stuff takes time. So the Government would like to move as quickly as possible. But, at the same time, we don't want to leave the community behind in this and not achieve that cultural change or not carry the community with us. Do you have any insights about how other people have done that well and how we might best approach it here?

ZOË ROBINSON: I would just say quickly that there's probably things that exist, that are good things that exist. So start in the place, because one of the other things that we hear from children and young people is the issues since 2015, as an example, for the first strategic plan, to now haven't changed. Mental health has always been something young people have talked about, and we do a lot of work in custodial settings and with children and young people in out-of-home care. They will tell you everything, and they tell it over and over again. Those themes haven't necessarily changed. I'm not saying don't consult. What I am saying is set those parameters very clearly. Know that there are things that you will hear, that have been shared time and time again. Now we need to start saying, "What does the action like look like? And how do you come back to those young people?"

To give you an example, sitting with 21 young people who were in hotels, knowing that I couldn't change those situations in that process, was very difficult. Thankfully, the Government has done things about that. But we now have to start acknowledging that people consult and talk a lot to lived experience, and that is incredibly important. I'm not saying don't. See what exists in terms of the data. We, obviously, share our strategic plan data very widely and can do so. But then make sure that, when you're consulting, it is with a positive outcome in mind and that those people will feel that outcome and see the impacts that they have, as well, because I think there's is a lot of consultation that goes on. So I think you can do some things quickly, and consistently bring people, but also make them part of the committees. Make young people sit on your committees. Make people with lived experience be a part of the design and all of it from the very beginning so you have them consistently as a part of it.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Chair, can I jump in on that because I think the gap that I also feel like exists when we do these consultations—and I'm keen to hear your thoughts around it and particularly in this Wales example of hearing about the idea, what can transport do to ease people's mental health. The people on the front line of all of the government departments and bureaucracies would know full well what stresses they are causing the people with lived experience. I feel like there is a gap there to your point. Is there any thoughts that you might have or take on notice—who should be consulted and talked to, in terms of government departments?

I feel like what we often hear is the head of a department giving the Government's view on something, and then we hear the people with lived experience. But often in "Local Member Land" what you get is that the people that are doing the frontline housing support or youth mental health support or local health district support actually know already what would solve the issues for the people with lived experience, without them needing to be consulted again. I am keen to hear thoughts now, but also, if you've got thoughts on questions on notice of where in the government departments we should actually be consulting people to feed into this, that would give the good indicators, the meaningful indicators, rather than the rezoning kind of measures and things.

ESTELLE GRECH: In a way, I think, maybe you've partly answered the question yourself. It's probably people within the bureaucracy that are dealing with people in the community, on the ground and have that actual lived experience, because they know what's stressing people out. So I think you're right. It's probably your more frontline workers, not people who are making policy and thinking of ideas, like me, behind desks, but actually dealing with people every day. I think that's probably all I'd say for now on that.

MARLEE BOWER: I think, going back to Jason's original question, one thing that was really powerful, that we saw in a few European countries, was around case studies that show how changes in transport and changes in education or changes in planning can have real, tangible impacts on a group's mental health or wellbeing. It makes sense intuitively when they see it, but it's not something that is readily available to lots of people. That's something, I think, that was really powerful in getting that community and cultural change very quickly. That being said, it is not easy to find, and that's a project we're trying to do at the moment. So we're happy to help when we can get it, but the data is pretty bad everywhere.

ESTELLE GRECH: I can also go to Jason's original question around how do you do community consultation well. Totally agree with Zoë. There's sometimes fatigue within some communities who've been asked a million times, but I think my original point around—if you had five outcomes that the public service can remember, hopefully, they're five outcomes the community can remember and resonate with, as well. So I think make it simpler, easier to understand and have accompanying case studies that make it real and bring it to life is probably how I would approach it.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Just on that, I am thinking about that question. The nature of public policy is complex and multifaceted. I'm looking at this. I've just recently been accustomed to this data now and to this framework. Say, for example, in my electorate of Fairfield—I did a PhD, and I was meant to talk about the whole concept of change as two to three initiatives and that's it. But the reality is that, when you're confronted with a particularly disadvantaged society like Fairfield, that web of things that I need to do is growing at an exponential rate. So I question whether or not, when you look at "less is more"—but, if you had adequate reporting and accountability measures, that complex web, provided that it's effective in the sense of its measurements—we could actually do better? Do you get what I mean by that?

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes. Let me give an example, like page 43 of the consultation. I agree with you, but also I think it's important as a government—you have limited time, limited resources, in reality. I think it's about making strategic decisions around which levers you pull that can have the most impact. If you go to page 43 for example—the outcome is "People, businesses and communities are connected through safe and reliable transport". One of the indicators is public transport and active transport mode shift goes up, which is really positive. That links to decarbonisation and better mental health and less stress, et cetera. But then, at the same time, there's an indicator of journey time reliability for roads, passenger satisfaction for roads. I guess what I'm saying is which is actually more important? Public and active transport, or roads experiences, which is typically people in private cars? When I say less is more, it's also about strategically choosing what actually matters to this Government, rather than having a sort of grab bag of anything that will lead to whatever outcomes.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Don't disagree. It probably is that we've got an infinite amount of stakeholder profiles.

ESTELLE GRECH: Yes. I'm really familiar with Fairfield. I started my career as a strategic planner at Fairfield Council. I know it's a rich, interesting, complex community. But, for example, one thing that I would think of, which would, potentially, pull a lot of levers, is thinking about women's participation in the workforce in Fairfield. And then you get to unpack all of these other issues, like what does cultural impacts mean, what does it mean if you're a new refugee and your qualifications aren't considered appropriate for Australia. There's so much, underneath women's participation in the workforce, that would come out, that would be really rich for a place like Fairfield.

ZOË ROBINSON: To that point, some of it is the complexity that the bureaucracy has created. Perhaps controversially, sometimes there are things that we need to just get our house in order as a government, which doesn't actually mean that we need to be—I think if you ask people about the things that matter to them, it probably looks somewhat similar in terms of family, freedom and access to things, as an example. They are things where we can go, as an example, "What do we need to do to line that up from our perspective?" If I take the example of young people who are going from 15 to 16 and want to get their licence and identifying documentation, that might be the first time they ever interact with a government department and it is a really exciting time. The beautiful thing about Service NSW is that you can go there, have a good experience, and probably solve a few problems at the same time. You don't really know what government department is behind that smooth experience but you are grateful for that smooth experience, versus the people that perhaps are calling housing hotlines and trying to solve a plumbing issue but don't understand the complexity of what that means in the background.

I think the complexity is often the thing that we have created in that space. It would be great for us to think about what are the things that we can line up first. If someone's outcome is that they want passenger satisfaction on roads, which I feel like there are probably a lot of things that could happen that we could just probably do, then we could survey to make sure we have done those things and "Do you feel like that now?", versus the really mental, physical, spiritual things which are probably harder for us as governments to necessarily

affect other than making things accessible. You have those things, and we've respected those things, and all of that. Sometimes I think it is about government getting its house in order.

The CHAIR: How do we collect the data? Some of it exists in various degrees of okayness, and some of it just doesn't exist at all. If we are talking about national-level data and State-level data and then going down, a lot of the submissions say that we have to at least get SA2 local government area data. We talked about the equity arguments earlier on about having demographic data, geographic data et cetera. Do you have any insights from other places that you have been around how the data framework is done well?

ESTELLE GRECH: I'm happy to start. We did the submission and we published it in our newsletter. It was great because I got all this feedback from our members. One of our members who works at Mecone worked in New Zealand in their stats division when they were doing their wellbeing budget. It was super interesting. They had to really think about the data that they need to collect and where it was worthwhile, which they did an assessment on. They had to commission that data to be collected. It cost money but it is worth it, especially if you are collecting data on the right things. Obviously, data is more meaningful when you can collect the same data over time and compare changes.

Last week the public debate around the ABS census questions and collecting LGBTQI+ data is literally this in action. That is so important so then we can break down data and see how it is impacting different cohorts. I think, like the New Zealand experience, ABS should be given more resources to collect rich, meaningful data that aligns with the wellbeing indicators. In the absence of that happening at the national level, New South Wales has the ability to do that as well. Again, you need to get the framework right so you know what you want to measure—for example, if it's mental health—and then work with experts to figure out what are the right questions to ask so that we can get the longitudinal data over time. It does require investment. It is worth it.

The CHAIR: If something is not in the national census, are we talking about—the extreme would be to run the New South Wales census in addition to that to plug all the gaps. If we want SA2, a different alternative is a less extensive process that may be run through local councils or through government departments. What have you seen that people have done that works?

SCARLETT SMOUT: Just two points on that. One is the opportunity that presents in the General Social Survey and the opportunity for, perhaps, some efficiencies that could be found with an increased investment from the New South Wales State Government. I don't, of course, understand the backdoor mechanics between State and Federal and ABS and how that could work on paper, but there could be an opportunity for efficiency there with making sure that there is sufficient sampling in the General Social Survey in New South Wales, particularly to enable if there was a predetermined subgrouping of particular population groups—potentially young people or different groups that you have highlighted, people who are from countries other than Australia et cetera—to make sure that sampling is sufficient.

The other point is that with the General Social Survey, New Zealand offers some inspiration. During the development of their General Social Survey they actually engaged in quite substantial consultation. When we've enquired about the consultation for the General Social Survey in Australia, it appears to be a lot more limited and a lot more selective. That's realistic because there are time pressures, but potentially for future waves of the General Social Survey there could be an opportunity for more consultation. That goes to your other point about consultation. If it's done at the point of designing the collection of the data, that can also enable you to have that data at your fingertips.

ZOË ROBINSON: It's not perfect, but I think a good example here in New South Wales is the Tell Them From Me survey that happens in schools. There is a question in that that asks about belonging. Data is so powerful, but data also can be very tightly held. I think we also need to get to a point where we're saying, "We don't want access to this data because we want to name and shame; we want access to this data to understand how people are faring and tracking." The Tell Them From Me survey, I understand, is going through a redesign. Thankfully, our Youth Advisory Council is assisting the Department of Education around that, which is great. But it has belonging data in it, and that would be a great thing for us to be able to access to understand how children and young people are faring.

In terms of the reasons it's not perfect, obviously not every student is participating in it. If you have a particularly small school or you might have some complexity in your school, it's not like we get every student. That might mean that sometimes we are missing more vulnerable students, as an example, or remote or whatever it is. There are things that need to be worked on, but it is a good example of a data set that could be utilised to understand how people are in New South Wales—certainly how children and young people are faring.

ESTELLE GRECH: I think it's also important to not let perfect be the enemy of the good. Especially if we start from data sources that might be imperfect, but if we know what is imperfect about them, we can improve

over time as long as we acknowledge that. Again, I'll point to Scotland. They have an equality evidence finder tool. That's where everything is stored relating to their wellbeing framework. They have maps and graphs and really good stats. When I was reading the consultation paper, it maybe implied that qualitative data wasn't a legitimate source, but when you're talking about wellbeing, I think it really is and should be considered.

ZOË ROBINSON: I understand and say that for those under 10, as an example, you can't do a survey necessarily as such. We're assisting with the Brighter Beginnings work, which means we're going to be talking to four-year-olds. We did the postcards to the Advocate, and we had three-year-olds telling us about their hopes for the future. There are ways that qualitative data means that you're engaging with a cohort that perhaps is not a part of it, but if you're thinking about future generations and policy you need to design, then we have to have three-year-olds and four-year-olds in that conversation and we have to understand what they're thinking about in terms of their wellbeing and future.

MARLEE BOWER: Could I just add one thing? I'm not sure if we've made it clear already, but with mental health, as well as populations that aren't usually included in these kinds of broader measures, you have to go beyond service use data. We know that many people do not access services: they don't have capacity, funding, accessibility. Just having hospitalisations or even access to GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists is going to miss out on people that are most vulnerable. You need to have types of data like broader surveys or qualitative research that allow for us to understand those that fall in between the gaps, particularly for the non-citizen residents who can't access services most of the time. You do need to have that kind of broader source of data.

ZOË ROBINSON: And you can creatively ask for it. Banks, for example, hold a lot of really interesting data about how people are tracking in terms of their wellbeing. Obviously it's de-identified and all of that. Certainly during COVID, as an example, we worked very closely with banks and other organisations—Ask Izzy was a good one—that told you what people were searching for on their platforms or where they were seeing things. So they're not giving you that, but there are ways that you could use data sources that exist. Obviously Google tracks searches. They use that, in terms of examples—they share it when there are some people tracking the same symptoms, as an example, so that they can understand there may be something happening in their community. I think there are good existing data sources that we just need to ask to access.

The CHAIR: That's a good point. Maybe through partnerships with private sector people like Quantium that analyse a lot of the bank data, and other economic outfits, we can find stuff that we otherwise wouldn't be able to get.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Just to put on notice that it would be great to get some examples of the kind of datasets that you think—particularly Committee for Sydney, within your membership, you would have access to various kinds of data that is collected that could be useful. I don't know whether, for example, Homes NSW tracks how many hang-ups they get on their call line. There's the People Matter Employee Survey that's all of the public service employees. There are existing datasets. Maybe another way to feed in is how we're bringing a lot of that together. On notice, any datasets that you think are good examples, which could give us a way to look at how that could intersect, would be really useful, in addition to the ABS suggestion that you made just now.

The CHAIR: I think we're going to have a lot of supplementary things for you. In my mind, one of the key focuses for us is how do we improve that set of indicators? I spoke earlier about, as you said, having a smaller number of holistic, integrated set of outcomes that intrinsically require collaboration, otherwise you're not going to get there. What are those and what should they be? How do we collect the data for those? What is the hierarchy, if it's a pyramid, and what is the more granular—and the lead versus lag indicator balance as well? We'd love to hear your insights into things like that. Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. You will each be provided with a copy of the transcript from today's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these within 14 days.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms ALISON HOLLOWAY, Chief Executive Officer, SGS Economics and Planning, affirmed and examined

Ms MICHELLE TJONDRO, Senior Associate, SGS Economics and Planning, affirmed and examined

Dr ANGELA SMITH, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Western Sydney, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee today to give evidence. Can you each confirm that you have been issued with the Committee's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

ANGELA SMITH: Yes.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: Yes.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about this information?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: No questions.

The CHAIR: Would anyone like to make a brief opening statement before we begin questions?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: On behalf of SGS Economics and Planning, I wish to thank this Committee for the invitation to give evidence before the inquiry reporting on the performance of New South Wales government services and driving wellbeing outcomes for New South Wales residents. Today I speak on behalf of our team at SGS Economics and Planning. SGS is a B Corp certified and an Australian employee-owned independent public policy advisory firm. Our collaborative work with governments and the for-purpose sector shapes policy and investment decisions that create sustainable places, communities and economies. We're committed to serving the public interest through our advisory work. We have structured our business to reflect this. Our ownership structure ensures our advice is not influenced by external investors or shareholders. We are in it for the long haul for the good of public policy. It also means that we invest in a research program.

Our submission is informed by this program and our track record in working with State Government agencies and local governments across New South Wales and Australia on some of the most pressing public policy issues, including housing supply, demand and affordability, land-use planning, community infrastructure, economic development, energy, climate change, education and health. Our submission to this inquiry has a focus on six ideas: the accessibility of evidence; the value of reporting at a meaningful level of geography; alignment with overall government priorities; measuring outcomes, not services or activities, within government; and how to embed the indicators into the public policy cycle and good decision-making. I'll hand over to my colleague Michelle, who will talk about some of our broader wellbeing research.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: The key points in SGS's submission are informed by our practical experience in designing, iterating, refining and implementing the SGS Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index. This is the only objective wellbeing framework that is available nationally. For over 10 years SGS has self-funded this research on the economic performance of Australia's cities and regions. We know today that gross domestic product and other economic indicators are not a satisfactory gauge of overall wellbeing. They are a measure of all goods and services produced in an economy but, importantly, they fail to account for the strength of human capital, for environmental health and for other facets of social progress that make a real difference to people's lives.

In 2023 we expanded our focus to report on six additional dimensions of wellbeing, recognising a need for granular data that goes beyond GDP. The Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index is available at the local government area scale and has coverage across Australia. It is a tool for understanding the spatial impacts of public policy. It tells us what is happening in one community to the next, in much higher resolution than what regional, State or national figures can convey. Having this spatial detail is, we believe, one way to guard against a one-size-fits-all approach to evidence that risks poorly targeted interventions. We support the New South Wales Government's development of a clear framework to drive wellbeing outcomes across New South Wales and commend the Government for initiating this discussion paper and consultation process.

ANGELA SMITH: We welcome the opportunity to be here and contribute to this important piece of Government work. I wanted to provide a little more context around the recommendations that we made in our submission, in particular how it relates to Western Sydney and beyond. We undertake research, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, and impact measurement for and with Western Sydney. We work with industry, local government and community organisations. The purpose of the centre is to advance economic and social wellbeing outcomes for Western Sydney communities.

Western Sydney, as you may know, is not only the third biggest economy in Australia; it is also around 10 per cent of Australia's population. It's no small area. We do a lot of work with data, using national data, census data, State-level data and local council data. We hear a lot from local councils, industry and community organisations that they are struggling with data, with frameworks, and are desperately in need of help around measuring impact. From our experience working on projects related to infrastructure development, housing, community and culture, and wellbeing, we're also bringing our practical experience of working with evaluation and measuring impact in the area.

Our submission has focused on the need for a place-based approach to be more granular, to really drill down to the LGA level in Western Sydney. Obviously there is massive spatial segregation across the city of Sydney overall, but then within Western Sydney we also have massive segregation between the more privileged LGAs, such as the Hills district, and the most marginalised areas, like Fairfield. When you look at any averages for the region, it masks those huge variations. We really want to see the Government taking a place-based approach that allows for data at the LGA level, or an even finer grained approach.

Secondly, working across a number of councils that have received WestInvest funding and working with local sporting clubs that have received other forms of State funding, we know that there is huge variation in the kind of impact reporting and monitoring and evaluation reporting they are required to do under different grants. We would love to see a more joined up, consistent, multisectoral approach across government. Having such consistency to New South Wales funded programs would also help feed into the collection of data and the development of indicators under this framework. Thirdly, on page 9 of the consultation paper, it says, "What we measure gets done." We want to argue that, beyond measuring, we need to set targets in order to ensure that things get done so that any measurement is linked to targets and putting plans in place for delivering on those targets.

Finally, we suggested a number of improvements to the proposed indicators that particularly help to highlight some of the disparities that Western Sydney suffers from: things like urban heat; the way that the lack of access to blue and green spaces feeds into ability to maintain active lifestyles; making sure that any metrics around representation in Parliament include people from non-Anglo backgrounds being in Parliament; that trust in institutions needs to include trust in media; and that the participation of communities from diverse backgrounds is not just measured through the creative and cultural events put on by Multicultural NSW but also that those communities, of course, want to attend mainstream events as well. Ultimately, for us, any framework that's measuring wellbeing and liveability has to be place-based and consider those diverse places and communities in areas like Western Sydney.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We'll now move to questions from the Committee. Before we begin the questions, I wish to inform the witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing within 14 days after receiving the questions. I might kick off the questions. We heard from a number of witnesses this morning. Some of the key areas of discussion were around, right now, the consultation paper has eight themes, 28 indicators and 120-something metrics. Do you feel that balance, that hierarchy, is about right? Should it be simplified? What is the balance between lag and lead indicators—more holistic indices—as opposed to very granular metrics? Secondly, both of your organisations talked about the importance of place-based, LGA-level data. What, in your mind, is the best way that we collect that data and ensure that it's accurate, consistent and benchmarkable across the State without having to completely reinvent a whole new census in New South Wales?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: Thank you for the questions. I might kick off. There is a broad range of indicators in the consultation document. We really focused on the back end—in table 1.10 on page 52, the wellbeing metrics, which I think narrow the focus into what's important to government and what are those community outcomes and wellbeing outcomes that we really want to have the focus on. The rest of the document and the indicators and frameworks, we really see those as service planning that are documenting activities of government and can be covered within agencies. It's these indicators in the wellbeing metrics that really provide an opportunity to be cross-government priorities and track the broader outcomes across the whole of government.

On your question of the LGA-level data, we think that's really important because we know that place matters in outcomes and the access to opportunity for different residents. As Angela clearly described, having data at the State level reduces that understanding of what's actually happening in different localities. We see that really clearly in the Federal Government's Measuring What Matters framework, where they just report at the national scale. We have found quite clearly in our Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index that there are significant variations across the State in key indicators. They're really important to help direct funding, priorities and understanding of what's happening.

I would suggest that a key partner in understanding data at the local government area level is local government, which knows their communities well. Many local governments are collecting really valuable data on

the wellbeing of their communities. There is an opportunity, perhaps, through local government integrated planning and reporting frameworks, to coalesce the data that local governments are already reporting through to the New South Wales Government to provide that back to local government and the community in a transparent manner.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: On the question around the hierarchy between themes, objectives and indicators, we were really pleased to see that there was a lot of alignment between the New South Wales Government's Performance and Wellbeing Framework themes and other indicator and thematic frameworks, like the OECD's framework, the Measuring What Matters framework and SGS's Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index as well. I would suggest having a host of indicators. One of the benefits of that is that it provides a wider group of stakeholders with an entry point to understanding how wellbeing applies in their local contexts. That, of course, does pose some logistical challenges when we're talking about annual updates to the datasets and challenges with sourcing the data in an accurate way as well. It was great to see in the consultation paper that there were plans for a proposed data development strategy. That can help to provide a clear plan about what's ahead. That will then set the framework up for longevity and practical application in the future.

ANGELA SMITH: On the first question, I would agree with what Alison said about those big picture wellbeing themes seeming appropriate as the guiding long-term impact areas. I think what is key is the multisectoral connection and the vertical logic model between how the indicators feed up to those themes. It's not so much about the number but about that logical flow and making sure that they connect into one another. At the LGA level, we know that there is so much variation. Local councils are a big source of data, but any New South Wales funded program, if there was consistency across the M&E frameworks and the impact evaluations that were required across different sectors and different agencies, then that would generate a lot of local-level data as well.

The CHAIR: I might throw to other Committee members. Does anybody have any questions?

Ms JENNY LEONG: I wanted to ask specifically and get in on your thoughts around an area. Taking, for example, housing, noting the Centre for Western Sydney and your submission talking about urban heat, and recognising the work that SGS does in relation to housing, I have a bit of a concern around the outcomes, looking to the wellbeing themes and whether they adequately reflect what we want. To take housing as the example, my concern is that if places are well designed and sustainable, does that actually mean that people can't overheat in their apartments, that they can afford air conditioning or cooling, that the windows open et cetera? Also, with suitable housing for vulnerable people, does it look at the broader housing needs of people in terms of insecurity and stress—that people who are middle class wouldn't necessarily have identified as vulnerable but may be under significant housing stress, may be suffering from urban heat effects and those kinds of things?

Can you talk about how you would see us ensuring that we don't have these siloed approaches? Housing was just an example, knowing the work that you've both done in these spaces. With the intersection with other considerations, how might you go about giving advice to us as a Committee for what the overarching measures of those kinds of things would be to address a people-centred approach to it rather than a government-department approach? Ms Holloway, did you want to start? Then we can go to Dr Smith afterwards.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: I think you raise really important points that the outcomes in the wellbeing metrics do have relationships with each other. There are connections between outcomes in one area and how they influence outcomes in other areas, and I think having an important understanding of some of those connections. It's not the framework or the indicators itself that will create change; it's how they get embedded into the public policymaking cycle and how they are then used to understand places and communities more, and also then understand what are the policy interventions that will achieve the outcomes that we're looking to see. It's not just about having these frameworks in place; it's more about what's next and how you're going to use them and apply them as well.

ANGELA SMITH: Just to add to that, thinking about how they're interconnected but also having strong definitions around words like "security" and "liveable", I think that's where some of those questions around urban heat and housing stress come into it. At Western Sydney University, for example, we have a whole research strength around urban heat. A number of people are very active on that issue, so I think it also comes back to consultation and how you consult with people with expertise and also with communities.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: I would like to add to that to say that outcomes performance, I believe, is just one piece of the puzzle. I think it's equally important, as Alison and Angela have said, to do that consultation in community, to make sure that you have that barometer into what community is feeling, and then using that, applying that and being open to refining or tweaking indicators over time. That's a really important mindset to take because we can only understand the long-term impacts of poor or better quality housing on people's health, for example, with the evidence before us, and that is a process that takes time.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I just want to ask about—I am happy for you to take it on notice—the existing data that is present. I note both of your submissions talk about data from different perspectives. It would be really great to get on notice what data that you're aware of exists or what you would love to have access to, recognising the value of open-source data but also, I guess, existing surveys, whether it be the local government work or other things that the Government could be looking at, rather than finding ourselves put in a situation where additional monitoring and evaluation is required when we actually have a lot of these indicators already through a range of different places. I'm happy for to you take that on notice, but it would be great to get some good examples that the Committee could consider of how that would be pulled together.

The CHAIR: Yes. SGS is your Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index. Could you elaborate on what data sits underneath? Is that local government data that is done through councils? I think one of your submissions mentioned a subjective survey about the community's perception of wellbeing. Is that your proposition?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: That's right. Our SGS Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index is an objective dataset. It largely draws from census data, as well as other datasets that have been created by our SGS team. The main one in that is our Rental Affordability Index that we produce with National Shelter, which uses rental bond data and collates it with other income datasets to identify a rental affordability index. But because that is national, it is also very limited in terms of data availability. In that work, we also identify that there's value in other national datasets that could add to that picture. But once you start to come at a State level, there are other datasets available, particularly around climate risk and natural resources, that aren't available consistently nationally that we could embed into that. We do cross-reference other subjective wellbeing datasets. One that comes to mind is the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, which they've been producing for a number of years, which is a survey of self-reported wellbeing, and the University of Canberra also does similar research. They are valuable datasets that complement the objective wellbeing datasets. Michelle might add to that.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: I think Alison has covered it fairly well. Our core dataset is the census of population and housing data. We do supplement it for the purposes of our annual update with new releases, intercensal releases from the ABS, and then we have the two proprietary datasets from SGS, being the rental affordability index as well as our small area estimates of the economic dimension.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Looking at this framework, this framework shouldn't be here for like one or two years; it should be generational if not beyond. In terms of setting it up for being fit for purpose not only now but in the medium and long term, what innovative practices should the New South Wales Government undergo or the Federal Government to ensure that we have data that's fit for purpose, that's agile, that's effective and that will bolster the M&E requirements, as you put, Angela, in your submission? What do you think the future looks like there?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: I think it's really important that it's set up for the long term. I think it's also really important that it reflects the priorities of the community and government to set those clear targets of what we want to achieve as a community and the outcomes that we want to see, and so then the metrics that sit within that need to reflect those broader outcomes. I think there is value in self-reported wellbeing and some subjective wellbeing measures. I think they do give a different perspective across people's experiences because the idea of wellbeing varies for individuals, depending on life stage and preferences as well. An objective measure only goes so far in terms of that understanding. I think it's about measuring those things where we can potentially see over time that they contribute to those broader outcomes that we're looking for.

One example is that in Scotland they've got a clear wellbeing framework, and they've identified that for the Scottish economy to work better for people in their community, they've got aspirations to grow their inclusive and democratic economy. They're interested in tracking and understanding the growth of social enterprises, employee-owned businesses, cooperatives and mutuals, and their contribution towards the economy because they know that that's important for the long term in their economic diversity and their link to local communities, and building and retaining wealth with the community. They're identifying those measures that are linking to their broader objectives that they have. I think it's important to think about those links and what's important longer term.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Just on that too, we heard previous submissions talking about less is best. I'm of the view—and this is my personal view—that we've got various stakeholder profiles that, in effect, you can't narrow down effectively. Given your experience of this index, should this framework be wide or should it be narrow?

MICHELLE TJONDRO: I referenced it briefly earlier when I spoke about the value of having a wide set of indicators. I think as an educational and community awareness-raising exercise, it does provide a wider range of stakeholders to get involved in understanding what the different levers are for improving wellbeing in

communities. I think having a smaller set of headline wellbeing themes is useful to keep the messaging really sharp and clear.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Are you aware of the New Zealand framework? I think it has five themes or so. How would that measure up to, say, the proposed framework here?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: We're familiar with the New Zealand framework but haven't looked at it in detail compared to what's presented here.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: What about Scotland's framework?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: They tend to all cover the similar themes. The OECD framework has really led a lot of the work that has happened in various countries and States. I think it all comes to that next level of detail about what you're measuring within that that's important to different communities.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: The Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index, what are the trend data there, out of curiosity, over the years? Better? Worse?

MICHELLE TJONDRO: The 2023 release of the Cities and Regions Wellbeing Index is the second year that we've published this. We released it at the local government area level this year, whereas last year, the first edition, we released at the SA4 level. Those geographies can be quite different, depending which part of Australia we're talking about, so we do caution a direct comparison. However, for next year's and subsequent years releases it will be easier to compare some of those trends. In terms of some of the headline trends from this year alone, what we saw was that headline wellbeing within New South Wales was highest in pockets of Greater Sydney.

These were areas that were really driven by their economic strength, good access to health care for the population and high levels of educational attainment. In terms of the spatial divide that we saw in wellbeing, it was really driven across New South Wales by the health dimension, and this was not unique to New South Wales. We saw metropolitan areas performing quite well in the health dimension compared to rural and regional areas. This really shows the importance of having good access to health care.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: So health care is the major driver of wellbeing according to the index?

MICHELLE TJONDRO: In our index, which contains seven dimensions of wellbeing, what we interpret from the release of this year is that health was one of the key drivers of wellbeing differences. But we're not suggesting that there is a hierarchy within our framework.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Your measurements there are life expectancy and major health condition.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: Yes, the proportion of the population living with two or more chronic illnesses.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: This is a bit of a self-interested question, sorry, Chair. Do you have any data there for Western Sydney relatively to the rest of the State?

ANGELA SMITH: We have a lot of data looking at Western Sydney versus rest of Sydney. That's usually what we use as the benchmark. We also draw on the census data and we analyse, in terms of income, labour force participation, access to creative and cultural events, arts funding—there are all sorts of things that we look at and we see, again and again, that massive spatial divide. We don't have an aggregated-up, overall wellbeing framework for Western Sydney, but we're interested in developing one that would tie into the New South Wales framework.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: The biggest thing that I've noticed, being a new politician, is that with respect to funding, when we talk about programs you've got a whole bunch of criteria. Those criteria have certain weightings and then some independent committee or independent body or independent group will assess programs according to that criteria. Do you think it would be persuasive for a wellbeing index to be there, if we do this with respect to a wellbeing index, to assess the merits of funding programs? I know it's a very simple question, but do you know if that happens already?

ALISON HOLLOWAY: I would agree with that. As I said before, it's not the framework itself that will have an impact; it's how it's embedded into decision-making, and that's one key tool to help it inform where investment occurs and to help to break down some of those silos across government. If you've got clear objectives that you want to achieve, it's about how you can make the whole of government responsible for achieving those objectives. We've seen governments at various points have objectives around, for example, increasing female workforce participation. Imagine if the Transport secretary was responsible for that objective. I think we'd have a

very different transport system operating. It's thinking about what are those broader things that we want to achieve and how we can look at the system as a whole to achieve those.

I think that's where there's value in these outcomes really speaking to those high-level government priorities. Then there might be a second tier of indicators that start to look at the next level, that provide additional information to inform more detailed policy settings. But these indicators are really a starting point to understand which locations should we be focusing on, what are the policy areas where we need more intervention, and then there's more detailed work, of course, to understand that more to help prioritise those investments.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: To Dr Smith first and then to the others joining us today, how do you rate housing affordability when it comes to driving wellbeing outcomes for the people of Western Sydney and more broadly across New South Wales?

ANGELA SMITH: I think it's a key concern. There's no doubt that housing affordability and obviously cost of living more broadly, and a general sense of insecurity around the economy, is critical for Western Sydney. We know that it ties into a range of other indicators around the ways that people spend their money, the things that they can access and the things that they might have to sacrifice. I think that's a key issue, and it speaks to the way that the indicators and the themes need to speak to each other as well.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: We know that housing is a key determinant of people's ability to fully participate in other aspects of life. Safe and affordable and secure housing is key to health outcomes, key to employment outcomes and key to study outcomes. I refer the Committee to the recent work from the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council, who have collated that evidence around the importance of housing in broader community outcomes.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Chair, if I could just follow up on that. I guess there is an element of both looking to make sure that there's intersection across the different areas within the New South Wales framework but also recognising that people's lives don't exist in a silo of State or Federal government, and recognising that there are so many people that are forced into poverty as a result of the low rates of pension or other assistance provided by the Federal Government, but also then the healthcare realities of what people can access in terms of GPs or others. How would you suggest or provide guidance to the Committee and the State Government on how those factors could be considered in the context of New South Wales? There's quite often a push to say, "That's not our responsibility so we're not going to touch that matter," when it may be one of the clear determinants of how well or not we're tracking on a wellbeing index.

MICHELLE TJONDRO: I think having the evidence base as a wellbeing framework that's established over the years, which allows us to understand the link between these different determinants, is really important. As we've talked about, wellbeing themes are closely related. We talked about the links between housing and education and employment and health. I think, once you've established those links, it then provides different service portfolios in different parts of government to have a common ground or a common language with which they can co-design solutions and interventions. I think that's a key thing that this framework can help to deliver.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: I think what you've described probably goes to the question of should we just measure things that the New South Wales Government is responsible for, or should we go more broad? I think, regardless of if the New South Wales Government is responsible for particular outcomes, it still bears the cost of those things not working effectively, because they hit other parts of the system. So a health system or an education system that isn't working effectively, those costs come further down the line as people aren't able to access the broader opportunities, be it employment and other things. I think it's about understanding and measuring those outcomes in your communities to then be able to advocate on their behalf and redirect resources as to what those priorities are.

ANGELA SMITH: Also, I think it comes back to the question of data and innovations in data. I think one of the things that's needed is more qualitative data. We've just been working with a local council on the regeneration of a park in Western Sydney, and one of the metrics to report on is around reduction in global warming of the extra shade created in this park; whereas it would make much more sense to talk to local communities about do you bring your kids here on a hot day or do you avoid this park on a hot day. The value that qualitative data can bring is important.

Secondly, I think greater connection with university research. I think JMI is doing a great job of linking policymakers and academic researchers. There is a lot of research being undertaken, again, at WSU and other universities, on housing specifically. So how does government actually get linked into academics in a way where that research translation into policy and building an evidence base that's useful is happening? Thirdly, I think one thing of the things we observe in Western Sydney—we work with census data a lot and there are gaps in census data. So really identifying those gaps and how they can be filled with other data sources. For example, we

conducted a large study on women's labour force participation in Western Sydney. One of the things we observed is that women in Fairfield, Canterbury, Bankstown and Cumberland all reported that they did zero hours of unpaid labour in the home. We know that the word "work" triggers people to say, "No, I didn't do any of that"—so looking at where there might be gaps, particularly for diverse communities, in the census data and looking to plug in other data sources to complement the census.

The CHAIR: If I could jump in, this goes back to the spatial element and the local place-based elements. What role do you think local government and local councils can formally play in this wellbeing program? Often in different organisations you have different levels of targets that cascade down to different levels of the organisation. Do you envisage or do you think it is workable that there are State-based—and there's a national framework as well. There's a national framework and a State-based framework. Should there be a local government framework? Should all of these be aligned? Comment on your thoughts around that and what you've seen work in other jurisdictions.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: Local government has a really key role. Local government are the level of government that is closest to communities and they're also the level of government that's reported as having the highest level of trust from communities. We would say that local government is critical to community wellbeing and economic wellbeing. Local government have all the systems and structures in place around their reporting requirements. I think local government would benefit from some guidance around what to measure and what's important for their local communities. An example from the UK local government is that there's now an established platform that measures and reports on key outcomes and indicators at the local government level. But it also allows local government to upload their data into that platform that has that transparency for the community and can also then report on what's important for local governments and start to build that consistent dataset over time.

We've talked today about the importance of looking beyond the State level and understanding things at the local government area level. Local governments will probably tell you that, within their local government areas, there is enormous variation in the outcomes for their community members. When you start to look at that level of geography, things like transport and accessibility become very important in local communities as well. There is a further level of data that would be valuable there. I know, for example, the City of Sydney, in their strategic planning, have set some clear targets that they want to measure. They have the action plans of how they're going to get there and they measure and report on that with their community as well as doing regular community wellbeing surveys that capture that data from their local communities as well. There are lots of opportunities, I think, to link up some of those things that are happening and work with local governments to have that transparency of data to help set some of those ongoing priorities as well.

The CHAIR: Especially so that it's not misaligned—local councils doing their own thing, completely misaligned with what's happening at different levels of government.

ALISON HOLLOWAY: Exactly. There is a lot of data that local government already reports that could be made more transparent to help support this process.

ANGELA SMITH: I think, as well, from working with local councils on impact evaluation, one thing is that even infrastructure projects—under WestInvest, for example—need to have a set of indicators around social benefits, even for infrastructure. Working with local councils, they are time-poor, they are resource-poor and they usually don't have people in place who are M&E experts or impact evaluation experts. It's seen as a tick-a-box thing for the funding that they wish they didn't have to do. Ways to support local councils to do this work would be to think about having a set of standardised indicators that are—in a sense, a library of consistent indicators that they could then choose to make customisable frameworks for different projects or programs they might be running that would then feed up into the New South Wales framework. That's why the framework needs to be narrow at the top and wide at the bottom so that there are a range of indicators to choose from. I think it's supporting councils by having something that makes it easier for them to do this work and some sort of support around recognising that this is actually a chance to really understand the impact that council work is having. Often councils are asking the questions, "Did we deliver it?" and "Did we deliver it on time?" and not "What was the impact of this infrastructure or investment that has been made?"

The CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. You will each be provided with a copy of the transcript of the day's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these within 14 days.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Ms DOMINIQUE ROWE, Chief Executive Officer, Homelessness NSW, affirmed and examined

Dr VINCENT OGU, Program Manager, Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, affirmed and examined

Mr MARK NUTTING, Strategic Planning Manager, Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everybody. I welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee today to give evidence. Can each of you please confirm that you have been issued with the Committee's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: Yes.

MARK NUTTING: Yes.

VINCENT OGU: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about this information? No? Thank you. Would anybody like to start by making an opening statement before we begin the questions?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: I would. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the inquiry into a framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in New South Wales. Homelessness NSW is a not-for-profit peak agency committed to building the capability of people and the capacity of systems to end homelessness. We want to see a future where everyone has a safe home and the support needed to maintain it. Our members include specialist homelessness services, people with lived experience, allied organisations and services all working together towards ending homelessness. We collaborate with others, people with lived experience and a broad network of partners to better understand the drivers of homelessness, advocate for effective solutions, build skills and knowledge and scale innovation.

My comments today are based on the Homelessness NSW's submission and will focus on the *NSW Budget 2024-25 Performance and Wellbeing - Consultation Paper* and its proposed outcome measures. At the moment we are in the midst of a homelessness and housing crisis in New South Wales, effecting the wellbeing of thousands of New South Wales citizens. We welcome the introduction of an outcomes framework for measuring wellbeing across the State, because it provides an opportunity to systematically track, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of housing and support services. At a time when the demand for affordable housing far exceeds the number of homes and vulnerable populations are increasingly at risk of homelessness, having a clear, evidence-based framework is essential for driving change.

Our submission emphasises key areas for improvement and expansion, ensuring that the framework not only tracks performance but also promotes long-term wellbeing outcomes for individuals and families at risk of homelessness. The recommendations we present aim to ensure that housing solutions are adequate, accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of those who are most affected by the housing crisis. I will begin by addressing the outcome in the "Housed" theme, "quality housing solutions are sufficient and affordable", focusing specifically on indicator three, "social housing dwelling standards". We are very pleased to see that the framework includes "social housing dwelling standards" as an indicator. It's a key factor in people's wellbeing and happiness. However, it is important to note that the framework does not provide specific details about these standards. We recommend further clarification on the criteria.

Additionally, we believe that the indicator should be expanded to include a focus on people with disabilities, who face increased risks of poverty, exclusion and homelessness, and increased threats to their wellbeing. Nationally, 9.5 per cent of those accessing specialist homelessness services have a disability, highlighting the need for accessible housing. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 already includes key measures such as the percentage of social housing meeting Liveable Housing Design standards. We recommend incorporating those key measures into the New South Wales framework.

In addition to accessibility, we propose expanding the metrics for this indicator to ensure that tenants have access to homes that meet accessible standards. These metrics would offer a more comprehensive and transparent view of the quality and upkeep of social housing, allowing for more targeted interventions when needed. The proposed metrics include the percentage of new social housing dwellings constructed to acceptable standards. Setting a clear benchmark on this would ensure that housing developments consistently meet expectations around safety, accessibility and long-term liveability.

They also include the frequency of inspections for social housing units. Regular inspections are essential for maintaining the quality of social housing over time. This metric would track how often inspections are conducted, ensuring that housing units continue to meet established standards and identify issues that require timely attention. Tenant satisfaction with dwelling conditions is also important. Measuring tenant satisfaction is crucial for understanding the lived experience of those residing in social housing. By using data from surveys already collected from tenants, this metric would indicate how satisfied people are with the conditions inside their homes, and also give us a direct insight into what areas require improvement. Finally, an area that can be quite difficult for social housing tenants is the response time for maintenance issues. Timely responses to maintenance requests are critical for maintaining the quality and safety of social housing. This metric would track how quickly maintenance issues are addressed.

Our submission also addresses the outcome in the "Housed" theme, "vulnerable people have access to suitable housing". We fully support the focus on ensuring that vulnerable people have access to suitable housing, particularly through indicator one, which tracks social housing wait times under NSW Housing Register. However, we believe this measure should be expanded to cover all people on the NSW Housing Register. At the moment there are over 57,000 households on the register. They meet a number of criteria for social housing. We don't want it to be just the priority list. This broader measure would highlight the true extent of housing demand and give us a better sense of the challenges faced by people who may not meet the strict criteria for priority status but still experience significant housing difficulties.

Our submission also comments on indicator four under the same outcome measure. Homelessness NSW supports the inclusion of measures that assess the impact of New South Wales Government budgetary processes on specialist homelessness services. In our submission, we suggest a reframing of indicator four from its current focus, which is around the proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are assisted by specialist homelessness services, to specifically measure the proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are assisted into long-term housing by these services. This reframing is crucial because it shifts the emphasis from merely tracking how many people access services to measuring the ultimate goal, which is securing stable, long-term homes for those experiencing homelessness. The ability to assist people into long-term housing is a more meaningful metric for understanding the effectiveness of responses to homelessness and the population's wellbeing.

However, in making this suggestion, we want to make sure that this measure is not construed as one that reflects upon the performance of specialist homelessness services or the sector. Specialist homelessness services in New South Wales are already overwhelmed by the sheer volume of clients. They are turning away one in two people at the moment. They lack direct control over the key factor that determines the success of this indicator— the availability of social housing. The chronic shortage of social housing means that no matter how effectively these services operate, they are unable to place people into long-term housing at the rate required to meet demand. As such, we strongly believe that the description accompanying indicator four, which refers to it as an "effectiveness measure for homelessness services", should be removed. Framing the indicator this way fails to recognise that the core issue is not the quality or effort of the services, but the structural shortage of adequate housing. We believe the recommendations outlined today will strengthen the framework and lead to better outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in New South Wales. We look forward to your consideration.

VINCENT OGU: SSROC is an association of 12 member councils from areas south of Sydney Harbour, covering central, inner west, the eastern suburbs and southern Sydney. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the performance and wellbeing framework. Up front, we will be suggesting that the performance and wellbeing framework could usefully include a ninth place-based theme. It could be entitled simply "Places: No places left behind". It is important that the framework links to the local level, where services and infrastructure are used and wellbeing is experienced. It is in place and on country that impacts and outcomes come together and reinforce the dynamic both positively and sometimes negatively. We note that in the consultation paper the section about the limitations of the indicator approach acknowledges the difficulty of tracking distributional differences between geographies. This is indeed a challenging task, with many overlapping administrative boundaries and data collection areas across the State. Nevertheless, the differences between places is one of the most important considerations for policy and resource allocation.

The lives of New South Wales residents are fundamentally linked to the specific qualities of where they live; they are place based. Almost all public policy issues are unevenly distributed by location. Housing growth, the Government's main priority and challenge, is, at its heart, place based. Creating communities with equitable access to infrastructure, education, jobs and cultural activities must be considered in the context of place. Through place-based planning we will increase the availability of housing that is well located, well designed, accessible and affordable so everyone can feel safe and secure.

As our communities grow and change, our urban and non-urban spaces should adapt to meet people's needs. Resource allocation decisions should transparently follow. More formal recognition of place would enable the framework to highlight the role of local government in place making and service delivery. It will enable more emphasis to be attributed to identifying regional needs, issues and collaborative solutions. All of the key national and State challenges—including housing affordability, productivity, circular economy, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action—require coordination between local, regional and statewide responses.

Policy priorities may also vary widely between places—for example, active and public transport use in metropolitan versus regional areas. Place-based thinking is needed to comprehend local challenges and maintain an equitable standard of living across New South Wales. SSROC would like to see a greater recognition of the importance of place throughout the framework. This would mean creating a new wellbeing theme for place, including specific place-based indicators, and ensuring that locational data is collected for the relevant indicators. This will make the entire framework much more relevant and useful to local councils and their communities. Overall, SSROC is supportive of the framework and would like to see indicators included which provide a basis for more effective planning policy and resource allocation for cities and regions like southern Sydney.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We'll now move on to questions from the Committee. Before we begin, I wish to inform the witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing 14 days after receiving the questions.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Dr Ogu, I agree in a sense—localised data is important, particularly when we're measuring wellbeing, at the very least at an LGA level. Do you have any thoughts there? One of the things that we're trying to grapple with—and I open it up to the floor as well—is how do we go about collecting data that is fit for purpose and sustainable? Do you think there's a role for councils to play there? Is there existing data that we can leverage right now to form this framework?

VINCENT OGU: The answer is yes. But also partly some of those data would need to be worked through to understand what nature of data, at what level, could this be collected, and what are the potential sources. SSROC in the last few years did some work on trying to benchmark what we call the liveability—what has now transmuted to wellbeing. We collected some census administrative data, ABS data so that, when you click on a specific location within our member council, if you want to check access to transport, it tells you what that is compared to the rest of the region. If you wanted to know a bit of a composite indication index—it's like overlaying transport infrastructure, housing—it also shows you in a bit of a GIS how that pans out across the region.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: If look at your membership, are there huge variances in wellbeing?

VINCENT OGU: There is, yes.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: What are the factors influencing those that have high wellbeing versus those that have low wellbeing?

VINCENT OGU: One of those factors obviously is housing and housing cost. Our member councils range from Sydney in the eastern suburbs, like Woollahra, Waverley, Randwick, and inner west off to Burwood, Strathfield, Canterbury Bankstown. There are a lot of differences in terms of—if you look at whether it is affordable rental housing, for example, that pans out differently across the region. Also access to employment or access to transport—that also pans out differently. You can see that visually.

The CHAIR: One of the questions I have is the extent to which local government should be involved or integrated into this framework. I think you suggested doing it by having a separate theme, which is about place—that intrinsically is about local. I wonder whether, rather than having a separate theme, there is a way to integrate local government in a holistic way in this framework, because we have a set of outcomes and indicators there. Could those be cascaded down a further level to the local government level so that local government becomes fully integrated into the framework? That way you talked about—well, what is the data that local council should be collecting that, as part of this wellbeing framework—that there are very clear guidelines around what that data should be so that it is consistent and benchmarkable across all local government areas in New South Wales. I'd be keen to get your thoughts on that.

VINCENT OGU: I will have a quick go and my colleague will come in shortly. I do agree that is possible. Looking at the framework at the moment, my view is that it is more of issue based—and if you wanted to translate that to place based. By the way, the framework can accommodate both. In local government, they try to plan for a place. They don't necessarily plan for education, transport. They don't see them as having different— so when they want to master plan a place or a strategic plan for their area, they look those things holistically. I think it is possible to, within the context of this framework, ensure that, on one hand, if you want to look at education, you can have it—at education. But if you want to look at the place, one key difference is that at a place

you would have to plan for this in an integrated way so that all these variable settings are able to reinforce themselves for the better social economic outcomes for specific regions or locations. Mark?

MARK NUTTING: Just in support of what Vincent said, I think the notion of wellbeing is something that is an integrated, cohesive whole rather than just a number of issues. Therefore, if you're trying to measure wellbeing, you need to have some place that you bring that all together. As Vincent said, you can still cascade down on these issues—and we would recommend that that happen—so that, on those specific issues, you could see what was happening around health or transport in a place. But you'd also then have another theme which would bring those things together, because you may have wonderful transport but you could have inadequate school opportunities and things like that. The wellbeing is actually influenced by the interaction between these issues.

The CHAIR: Yes. And it could be that, having seen a State-level framework, a local council will adopt its own wellbeing framework in the way that it reports. Through OLG and other measures, there are similar goal-setting or reporting frameworks put in place at the local government level that would hopefully achieve that holistic view that you talked about. I had a question for the representative from Homelessness NSW. In your submission, you talked a lot about lived experience of people who are homeless. How do you think the wellbeing framework can capture some of that lived experience of people who are homeless? This goes to a data question. What changes do you think can be made in the way that data around homelessness is collected to inform the framework?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: That's a really good question. There are different types of homelessness as well. Some of them are more difficult to gather data on. We know rough sleeping is something that's easier to gather data on. That's people who are sleeping on the street, in tents or in cars. But people who are—and particular demographics tend to do this—couch surfing, or existing in a transient way, not having a proper home and having to skip from one friend or family member to the next, are a lot more difficult to track. You can when they make contact with services, but if they're not making contact with services, that's quite difficult. Then we also have overcrowding. That's a particular challenge in some areas, as I think my colleagues here would recognise—more so than in other areas. That's where the home is just not suitable or safe for the habitation that's going on there, so it's another form of homelessness.

In terms of how it might help, the best data that we have are some of the access to services. You wouldn't want to count outputs there; you'd want to count outcomes. That's why we would suggest it's about what amount of time it takes you to get into long-term housing. Some people at the moment in New South Wales are waiting 10 years to get into long-term housing. It is going up. In some areas, it's particularly bad. That's where the level of demand is very high. One of the areas where the demand is very high is actually in the North Coast of New South Wales—very high or increasing levels of homelessness there, but housing stock that's only at 2.6 per cent. The waiting time there is six years for housing. That's the median wait time, not even the average wait time, so you're seeing people there for extended periods. Actually having a framework that sets some guardrails around those waiting times would give a very good indicator about what our level of social housing investment should be to bring that down.

I think I mentioned that, at the moment, we've got 57,000 households on the waiting list. That's on the general waiting list, not the priority list. Those 57,000 households—we know the number of people who are wanting to access or could access social housing is actually a lot higher than that because of some of the processes that are applied: the cleaning of the waiting list every so often or, if you don't respond to a letter in a particular time, you're off the list and you start again from the bottom, and you don't realise that you've been pushed off. All of those things can be measured and do have a real impact on people's wellbeing. The longer you're on the list, the more likely you are to move into the rough sleeping category—which is, some might say, the more dangerous category of homelessness.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Thank you so much for your work in this space. I represent Fairfield. We have around about 3,800 people on the waiting list, so we're the highest in the State. The waiting list is in excess of 15 to 20 years for some people who I've dealt with. It's an area of significant interest to me because every time I walk in Fairfield I get engaged about social housing assistance. I'm acutely aware. I know that Rose—and I'm not throwing out Government messages here—is very keen on addressing that. I'm looking at some of your points here. You mentioned overcrowding. Something I was going to say is that I don't see overcrowding—did you see overcrowding in any of these metrics or no?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: No.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I think that's a very important point, personally. I know in Fairfield, for example, I had a gentleman have six kids, I believe, live in a two-bedroom unit. They've got another six people living in a two-bedroom unit as well. I think that is important. I want to go through some of these points that you talked

about. Vulnerable people having access to suitable housing—the first one relates to the social housing waiting list, expanding indicator one to include all people on the housing register. Do you have any comments about that?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: I think it's quite important. To be on the housing waiting list, either on the priority part or on the general part, your circumstances are actually pretty difficult. There are a lot of challenges for you, and you are close to being homeless, if not already homeless. It's quite likely. I think we need to be a little bit more ambitious when we're looking at the wellbeing of people. One of the fundamental things that people need to not draw down on health resources and on justice resources is a house—a safe and secure home. Looking at that waiting list in that general sense of all 57,000, rather than the 8,000 or 9,000 that are on the priority waiting list, I think is absolutely critical. If we only do the 8,000 or 9,000, we're ignoring the impacts on thousands of families who will not be able to find—there's no way they're finding a proper home on the private market. They need others to intervene for them and support them in getting those safe and secure homes.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I accept that. It's a valid point. The other interesting point you raised, I looked at just then thinking it's a valid point: the proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are assisted by specialist services as opposed to the number of people. I found that to be fair. I found that to be a valid point that you raised. Do we have readily available data about people who are homeless out there?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: The data's a little bit patchy. It's a developing area, to be frank. What we do have is good data on people who access specialist homelessness services. We don't have good data on people who access homelessness services more generally. You can have specialist homelessness services, which is sort of part of the official system, but then there are a number of community organisations and other types of organisations that are providing support services—food services, housing—that aren't captured in that data collection. We can see that specialist homelessness service part of the system. What that tells us is that last year 68,400 people accessed service—needed help. We know from that data as well that one in two, or 51 per cent, got turned away. They weren't able to access service. There's a clear mismatch there, again, of—it sounds very economic—supply versus demand. The demand is very strong, and we just don't have enough service. But, again, there's holes in that data. If we had better data across what's happening in the service spectrum, then we would be able to better plan and better resource our solutions that would mean people got help more quickly than what they're getting at the moment.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: The final point is something that I'm pretty passionate about. I haven't seen it anywhere. You might want to add commentary about it. It is domestic violence victims and survivors— accessibility to housing for those survivors who are trapped. My engagement with DV survivors is that people don't want to go to refuges and take their kids there; they want housing. That's an important part of a wellbeing framework there because they deserve it. I know that the Government's spending a fair bit on social housing, particularly for DV survivors—4,200 homes. Has there been any commentary or any injections within this wellbeing framework for vulnerable people, particularly calling out DV survivors?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: Not that I'm aware of. I think it's a particular area. The Government has paid attention to that area in recent times. I think some of new social housing construction we're going to see over the next four years is going to help. I don't think it's going to come anywhere close. We know that, at the moment, there's women and children that are remaining in unsafe environments because they don't have an option to go out. There might be a refuge, but the refuge is full; or the refuge, for whatever reason, is inappropriate; or for whatever reason, the woman with her children is there going, "What's the safest option available to me out of all of the options?"

Ideally, it would be moving into a house immediately where the children could be safe from the situation they're in, but that's not always the case at the moment. There used to be a situation here in New South Wales where one in three homes was social homes. We're down to one in 20. That's made a real difference I think, particularly to those cohorts that are very vulnerable getting the access that they need. One of the things I hope that this framework will do is actually give us really good pictures and indicators of where to start resourcing so that we can improve the wellbeing of women like that. Because, as we know, there's a lot that are not able to access services for a range of reasons.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: From your experience, DV victim-survivors—will they qualify for the priority list or the general list? What have you found?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: Generally, the priority list. That priority list—it varies. If you're on the North Coast, as I mentioned, you're going to be on the priority list for at least nine months. That's nine months that that woman and her child are existing in really dangerous circumstances. They've gotten to the point where they need to get out, so it can be quite a long period. If you're down in the Illawarra, my recollection—I'll come back if I'm incorrect—I think it's around the six month mark. Again, that's six months of being in an unsafe home, often with children. We know across New South Wales the situation is pretty dire for a lot of these families. We

know that there are car parks across New South Wales that currently have women and their children in cars with security guards trying to keep them safe because there just isn't the social housing stock to keep them safe.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Would you agree with me about having DV survivors in this as a metric?

DOMINIQUE ROWE: Yes.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: My question is probably directed more to our friends from local government. It's all well and good for us to collect data, particularly from a State Government point of view, but we all know what cost shifting is like. I'd like your opinion as to the cost—not that I'm asking you to have it now, but you simply have to have an opinion as to what it would cost local government to collect this data for the State Government, and what you consider would be an effective way to ameliorate that revenue cost to councils. I'm sort of leading you a bit.

VINCENT OGU: Yes, councils obviously would want to be resourced to be able to do that. They've recently found there's been some cost shifting happening in the last few years. I'm not speaking for them, but they would certainly want to be resourced to do that.

MARK NUTTING: Could I just add to that? Obviously you'd try to maximise the use of data that was available at the State level and see whether that could be brought down to a regional or local level. There is quite a lot of data in that space, so it's not like you'd have to collect all of the data. The other thing that you'd want to do would be to integrate this with your existing reporting where possible so that you weren't doubling up and you're only collecting data once. There is quite a lot of reporting that local government does—things like the community strategy plans. There is quite a lot of existing data. Part of the puzzle and solving that problem would be to integrate with what's already collected.

VINCENT OGU: I agree.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Ms Rowe, are you already resourced to collect that data, or if you had to collect new data? The issue is, does the State coordinate it and pay for it themselves? My concern would be local councils, particularly the ROCs, tend to be pretty well under-resourced. They do a great job, but they're doing a lot of things. If you don't resource it correctly, you're not going to collect that data effectively.

DOMINIQUE ROWE: I think there's a couple of sources of data that's used in homelessness. One of those is the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data. That's very focused on specialist homelessness services. Also, Homes collects a lot of data on homelessness. It's got a database that, again, collects that data from specialist homelessness services. As I mentioned to my friend before, that doesn't take into account that unregulated part of the system. It can take into account the regulated part of the system, which is a large portion of it, but there is other activity happening that we don't have oversight over—or that no one in government yet has oversight over. That would require some level of resourcing to be able to get the data across the system as a whole.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: I suppose, Chair, just very quickly, my point is that it's very easy for a State entity to say we need to collect this data and this is the data we need. What happens, more often than not, is that it is left up to local government, or not-for-profits and so forth, to resource the collection of that data, which means employing more people. Maybe for a discussion at a later date, one of the conclusions from this should be that we have timely and effective resourcing to enable this data collection for wellbeing to be conducted.

The CHAIR: Fair enough. Maybe we can parlay that into a broader question for SSROC. What, in your view, is the best way for local government to collaborate with the State Government in respect of this initiative and in respect of wellbeing budgeting?

VINCENT OGU: I would think that part of the approach would be to get them more engaged, maybe in working group settings, so that their views of the issues and the challenges would be considered in the process of trying to—and I'll use the word—co-create this. I think that would help.

MARK NUTTING: I think you do really need the strong collaborative approach which engages local government. It does need resourcing to do this development phase. I think data mapping would be a good place to start to see what's already collected under various funding programs and strategies that are already existing, to find out the gaps, and then to consider whether some of that collection could be reorganised at very little cost, maybe, over time. You might need to say, "If we're going to collect it, who should to collect it? Is it a collaborative effort to collect it? Can the State help? What's their interest?" Often, funding for local government comes from the Commonwealth and the State, and often they have reporting responsibilities with that funding. They're not well integrated. They're probably not integrated within this framework that we are talking about. There's a whole negotiation phase where you understand what the landscape is and then you try to get alignment. That involves

work, and it involves, I suppose, a degree of consensus amongst very diverse councils. But it is still valuable, I think.

The CHAIR: Are you aware of any councils that have taken their own approach to wellbeing budgeting or wellbeing reporting? You can take that on notice, if you like.

MARK NUTTING: Yes, I will take that on notice. I think some councils have made partial steps, not in a comprehensive way that we're talking about but in various aspects, or they've engaged services like place-based wellbeing scores and things like that. I know that there's some of that around.

VINCENT OGU: City of Sydney, for example.

MARK NUTTING: Yes, the City of Sydney. It would be quite variable.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. You will each be provided with a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these within 14 days. Thank you very much.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

Ms CARA VARIAN, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Service, affirmed and examined

Ms YVONNE MUNCE, Executive Director, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms MARWAH ALMOMANI, Systemic Advocate, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW, affirmed and examined

Dr ALAN HUI, Director of Policy, A New Approach, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms KATE FIELDING, Chief Executive Officer, A New Approach, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr MIKE SALVARIS, Director, Australian National Development Index, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses. Thank you for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee today to give evidence. Can you please each confirm that you've been issued with the Committee's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

CARA VARIAN: Yes.

YVONNE MUNCE: Yes.

MARWAH ALMOMANI: Yes.

KATE FIELDING: Yes.

ALAN HUI: Yes.

MIKE SALVARIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about this information?

CARA VARIAN: No.

YVONNE MUNCE: No.

MARWAH ALMOMANI: No.

KATE FIELDING: No.

ALAN HUI: No.

MIKE SALVARIS: No.

The CHAIR: Ms Fielding, Dr Hui and Mr Salvaris, I note that you are appearing from Canberra and Melbourne and, therefore, may not be covered by the New South Wales laws of privilege. Any defamatory statements made, therefore, may not be privileged. I think the secretariat has reached out and explained that to you. Would anybody like to make a brief opening statement before we go to questions?

CARA VARIAN: I start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people, and pay respects to their Elders, past and present. The NSW Council of Social Service stands in solidarity with First Nations people and communities in their fight for justice and self-determination. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide evidence today. As the peak body for non-government organisations in the health and community services sector, we work alongside our 400 members to progress social justice and shape positive change towards a New South Wales free from poverty and inequality.

As outlined in our submission, NCOSS supports the introduction of a performance and wellbeing framework and commends the Government for this initiative. Our submission included nine recommendations. I wish to highlight two issues today in my opening statement. Firstly, we recommend that the framework includes known social determinants, which should also include agreed targets that we're collectively aiming for. In particular, that includes a definition of poverty as well as a measurement of poverty. But it could include other measures, such as food insecurity, wealth inequality, early childhood development, education levels, social inclusion, discrimination and healthcare access.

The framework should measure both the overall level of wellbeing and its distribution. Indicators should be presented in a way that enables the analysis of wellbeing distribution. By that we mean that we should be able to understand the data based on socio-economic status, gender, First Nations status, cultural and linguistically

diverse communities, age and geography. Without this, there's a risk that the true picture will be hidden and undermine the intent of the framework. We have an example from our recent poverty mapping research which showed that between 2016 and 2021, the poverty rate of New South Wales—which, in our definition, is at about 13.4 per cent—only changed by 0.1 per cent.

But that hides the change in the distribution of poverty across New South Wales. It doesn't show that there are significant increases in, and greater concentration of, poverty in communities in Western Sydney and south-west Sydney. It also doesn't show the differences between regional and metropolitan New South Wales for specific cohorts and, in particular, young people. And it didn't show the alarming increase in poverty rates for older people, which, during that period, changed by 26 per cent. Thank you for the opportunity to make these comments, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

YVONNE MUNCE: Thank you for the opportunity to address the Public Accounts Committee on behalf of the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW. As the peak body representing people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, MDAA is uniquely positioned to offer insights into the pressing challenges and opportunities in ensuring equitable services and supports for these communities. Our vision is for a society where every individual, regardless of background or disability, feels welcomed, included and supported. Our goal extends beyond mere inclusion. We strive for a society where diversity is not only anticipated but celebrated. MDAA is dedicated to promoting, protecting and securing the rights and interests of people with disabilities through various advocacy services, including individual and systemic advocacy, NDIS appeals and reviews advocacy, and community-based projects like the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme. Our submission provided a comprehensive overview of the key areas where the current systems need to be improved to better serve culturally and racially marginalised individuals with disabilities.

We've drawn upon extensive consultations with our clients to identify where the system falls short and propose recommendations. Through these consultations, we've found there's an urgent need for accessible housing solutions and support systems that address the unique needs of individuals with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Our recommendations focus on improving accessibility in new developments, expanding housing options and streamlining the process for urgent housing transfers. There's a need for enhanced disability awareness and better implementation of support plans in schools. We propose mandatory training for educators, strict adherence to the safety protocols, and improved communication between schools and families to ensure equitable education opportunity for children with disabilities.

There's a need to address gaps in social and recreational opportunities for older culturally and linguistically diverse individuals. We have witnessed an erosion of government communications, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our recommendations include better translation services, increased funding for community spaces and efforts to rebuild trust through clear and culturally sensitive communication. There's a need to address employment barriers in Western Sydney. This, coupled with high living costs, disproportionally affects individuals with disabilities and their families. We advocate for local job creation, affordable transport solutions and targeted financial support to alleviate these pressures.

Finally, we underscore the need for cultural sensitivity in health care to address the lower life expectancy and higher rates of preventable diseases among people with disabilities. Our recommendation focuses on cultural training for health professionals, involving family members in care decisions and providing accessible health information. MDAA firmly believes that an inclusive and responsive performance reporting framework is essential for improving the wellbeing outcomes across New South Wales. By addressing the specific challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse communities and individuals with disabilities, we can work towards a more equitable and supportive society. Thank you for considering our submission, and we look forward to further discussions.

KATE FIELDING: I'm joining you today from Ngunnawal country with my colleague Alan Hui. I want to acknowledge Elders past and present. We're from A New Approach, Australia's national arts and culture think tank. Before you ask me, yes, we have a broad definition of arts and culture, and probably the type of arts and culture that you love and take part in every day is probably included in our remit. I look forward to questions on that. We believe that Australia can be a cultural powerhouse and that Australia's creativity can be locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential.

Australia was initiated by and is entirely supported by philanthropy from right across the country, and our work helps bridge the gap between knowledge and policy. We do this because the evidence shows us that arts and culture are crucial for a vibrant, equitable and prosperous future. We welcome community, being one of NSW Treasury's wellbeing themes and the explicit recognition that arts and culture contribute to wellbeing. Our own research with middle Australians found that arts and culture is embedded in, and inseparable from, their daily lives and therefore their wellbeing. Our research also shows that governments play enabling and stabilising roles

in arts and culture, particularly in access, and that what helps government fulfil these roles in arts and culture is to plan, report and evaluate the impact. We welcome your further questions.

MIKE SALVARIS: I am the director of the Australian National Development Index Limited, based in Melbourne but working with State governments across Australia and local governments. We're a not-for-profit organisation, and our primary function is to work with governments and communities to develop wellbeing frameworks and measures of progress. We've been in this field, I suppose, for about 25 years, and we've worked with other countries, with the OECD, the United Nations and many local governments. I'd like to draw attention to the importance of having a wellbeing framework, both as a democratic innovation and also because of its important policy nature.

In our work with international organisations, we would say that there have been some key lessons that have been learnt from developing a wellbeing framework. One of them, of course, is the limitations of GDP as a wellbeing or progress measure—the idea that wellbeing is in fact holistic; it includes many different dimensions; secondly, the importance of engaging citizens in developing new progress measures because we are facing a notable decline in civic confidence and in democracy; and the third aspect is that wellbeing frameworks are not simply decorative or statistical. They need to be built into government because what we're talking about here is making equitable and sustainable wellbeing the primary focus and priority of government, rather than just keeping on increasing GDP.

We've put in a quite detailed submission, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to that. I'm speaking to you from the lands of the Wurundjeri people in Melbourne and acknowledge their traditional ownership. We believe—having seen the consultation paper, the statement by Minister Houssos and other background information—that you have in New South Wales a wonderful opportunity to develop a genuine best-practice model, but it needs to be thought of as a major enterprise. It's not simply a matter of sleekly arranging statistics or getting even new statistics, although you will need them, but it is a major democratic reform and a government reform. There is much to learn from international work and overseas. There's a huge amount that has been done over the last 20 years, and Australia itself has been a significant participant in that.

Our submission, while making a number of very detailed suggestions, recommendations and changes, concluded that you have built a good foundation but that you need to think now seriously about a longer term plan for doing this properly. From the community engagement side of it, I've worked with a number of countries in developing community engagement plans for wellbeing frameworks, and I can say that in Canada, for instance, which has now been going since about 1999, it took at least five years to get proper community engagement. A critical aspect of a successful model is recognition of the time it takes, the need to have extensive and inclusive community engagement, the need for collaboration with other sectors such as community sectors, and research—the universities, the ABS and others.

It's essentially a collaborative project with many potential benefits for the State that does it well, and they include not only better policy, more engaged citizens, better ways of tackling large projects and problems, a better use of statistics and information, more transparency in government. So there are a whole lot of benefits in the way this is done, but it does need to be thought of more carefully. I think it will be fair to say the consultation paper is not addressing either how the system will be built into government or how the community is going to be engaged more extensively because I think it only has referred to possibility of submissions.

I'm not sure what has been done in the second half of this year as was indicated, but there is a need to plan that very thoroughly, in conjunction with community organisations. There is a need to budget a significant amount of resources. I'm working currently with the Western Australian Government on a five-year development program for a Western Australian progress and wellbeing index. I'm sure that we'd be very happy and the Government in WA, which is starting from much the same position as you are in New South Wales, would be very happy to share that plan and to work with you, because I think there's a huge amount of benefit. You've said in your consultation paper that you're aware of all of the other things that are being done and you're happy to learn from them. We'd be very happy to share that with you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. That concludes the opening statements. We'll now move to questions from the Committee. Before we begin the questions, I wish to inform the witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing within 14 days after receiving the question. I might kick off with a question, if I may. We've been having discussions with a number of other witnesses in other sessions. One of the main things that we've been trying to get our head around is right now the existing framework is set out in the consultation paper. It has eight themes—I think 20-something indicators and some 120-something measures below that. We have heard some commentary that maybe less is more and that there should be a fewer number of holistic, integrated measures. I want to get your feedback about the metrics that we've set out there. I know that some of you have suggested there are additional metrics that should be added to

cover other areas but, in a general sense, your sense of whether the balance is right in terms of the holistic metrics and the detailed metrics, lead and lag indicators et cetera.

MIKE SALVARIS: Can I respond to that, Mr Li? The consultation paper indicates about 120 indicators. The idea of having a community engagement process in which you're effectively asking people to give a tick or a cross to 120 indicators is not feasible, I don't believe. I think if you examine the way in which these processes have been developed in other countries, they didn't start out with a huge bunch of indicators, saying to lay citizens, "Is this the right indicator or not?" In some cases that is a technical question and in some cases it's a normative question. In other words, it goes back to your values.

So I think it would be more useful to talk about the whole process and at what point and on what issues the community is involved. If I can take Canada as an example, when I started working with that project in 1995, the initial question was similar to the one you framed in the consultation report: What kind of New South Wales do we want? What are the key goals and aspirations we have? What are the important principles? What are the key issues? Then work towards the outcomes, or the domains, rather, the themes. I think you've got those themes pretty well, but you haven't got a theme there for governance and democracy, which is, I think a major omission.

But I think it would be better to think of it in terms of the process rather than simply dumping, if you like, a whole lot of indicators on people when they are, effectively, technical. The indicator process, the selection of indicators, effectively happens at the end of the process, not at the beginning. You need to know what your values are; what are the key goals you want to set; what would be the concrete outcomes from those; and then, and only then, how you would measure them. What are the most effective measures? As I said, in some cases that's self-evident, but in other cases—for instance, the environment—it's a purely technical question that requires experts to work with laypeople, and that's the model we've set up in Western Australia.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Chair, if I could jump in on the back of that. Thank you so much, Mr Salvaris, for outlining that. I want to bring NCOSS into this discussion. You made a submission around there needing to be a really clear purpose about what this is. That, to me, appears to be what is missing, and potentially is the difference between a budget that is used to look at finances and money and figures, versus the idea of a wellbeing framework and what we're looking at in terms of its overall purpose, why we're doing this. It feels a bit, at the moment, like the purpose of doing it is to report on a number of things that are not about money.

But I think the whole initial premise of why we want wellbeing budgets and other kinds of measures like this is to improve outcomes within society. To do that, we need a purpose. So I seek the input of NCOSS, and anyone else who wants to jump in, as to what the guiding purpose, the bigger picture, is. We have heard a lot of evidence so far today about the risk of there being too many indicators, too many silos, and the need for some top-line intersectional—for want of a better word—priorities. It would be great to get a sense of what you think might drive those, but also how those might be developed. I'll go to Ms Varian first.

CARA VARIAN: My view on this starts on page 13 of the initial document, where we're starting to talk about embedding and measuring equity, inclusion and fairness. I recommend that "equity, inclusion and fairness" is one of the things you should be aiming for. One of the issues that we covered in our submission is that you really need to have an aim and, therefore, a target of how you achieve that aim. While it's important to be measuring things, it also needs to be connected to policy development. It sounds like part of this is wanting to put equity front and centre, which is something that we, obviously, greatly support. But if we can understand what an equitable society would look like and, therefore, how to get there, then we can start working out what to measure. From our members, we're hearing regularly that one of the struggles that they're facing within their service delivery organisations is that wealth inequality within New South Wales is growing. That's not really covered in this document.

I know at the moment there is a measure of how long the waiting list is for public dental care in New South Wales. Yesterday I was on the Central Coast with the Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal community controlled organisation. Their waiting list is too long, but that doesn't demonstrate that they're not getting any men coming in for proactive dental care. There are two issues here and because of the measure that was chosen, it's disguising part of the issue. If you flip that on its head, rather than looking at what a waiting list might look like, making sure how much of the population is engaging in primary dental care on an annual basis would be, I guess, a clearer way of measuring health access, as an example.

YVONNE MUNCE: Would we be able to take that question on notice?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: Anthony, did you have a comment?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Yes, I do. It is one of the questions that I've raised before. If, particularly, small arts groups or not-for-profits are made to collect more information on behalf of government, to whatever end, should the State pay for the additional cost involved or should that be left up to those smaller organisations? Whichever way we look at this wellbeing framework, I acknowledge Kate Fielding's work. I've not met Kate, but I am very much aware of the work she's done, particularly in regional New South Wales and regional Australia. The benefits of arts projects and organisations in regional New South Wales cannot be underestimated, particularly within our Indigenous communities. It's about how you measure, for example, attendance at schools where there are projects such as Moorambilla, where they've seen a rise in school attendance, and then, of course, how you would go about measuring the flow-on effects from that.

It's hard for Treasury. To your point, Mike, when you try to financially quantify benefits and outcomes, it's a bit difficult. It's like with the jail population; it will increase at the same level, more or less, as the normal population, so it's easier to just build more jails rather than going back to, for example, putting money in upfront to stop people going into jails. There is always that issue with Treasury. It finds it hard to quantify that $10 million in an arts program in regional New South Wales may have a long-term, $200 million benefit over 25 years to the Government through people not going to prison, less domestic violence and so forth. My questions are, one, about the cost shifting; and, two, if less is more—as has been mentioned before—how would you do it? I've never been able to work it out. Maybe there is some input here, so you're not wasting all your time.

KATE FIELDING: Can I check who that was directed to?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Kate, and then to Mike.

KATE FIELDING: Great, thank you. The first point I'd make is that this tool doesn't need to be the only tool. Certainly, I'd recommend an omnivorous approach here. As someone who works with data, it is terrific to use the data that is available to inform decisions. I can see this framework is definitely trying to do that. To your point, though, there will be many things that it can't capture. That will be partly to do with the non-collection of data and partly to do with this not being the right tool for that. You gave a terrific example there, where particular types of front-end investment can provide a long-term better return on investment. I would say perhaps some of those examples are better done through case studies of those particular examples rather than necessarily being able to do broad, whole-of-State data collection through a framework like this. My tidy self would prefer that we could have one mechanism to address that, but I think that is unrealistic. We need a three-dimensional approach to gathering the types of information that will help inform, in an iterative way, the kind of outcomes that are being sought.

Speaking to the earlier point around this needing a vision and a purpose, I think that we should be approaching this as an iterative process, not a "we need to get it all perfect before we can do anything". To the point of the risk of cost shifting, there are good datasets that could help that do exist. I would strongly encourage you to use the datasets that do exist. Some of them do include a cut by geography, so being able to see some of those access and participation issues through different lenses. Absolutely there is significant data already collected from arts and cultural organisations of all scales. I think looking at accessing and using the data that is already collected should be the first point, rather than a kneejerk reaction of, "Let's try and collect more data from those organisations." I suspect that would be the same across many other industry areas.

MIKE SALVARIS: If I can add to that, I think it's important to think about indicators as useful tools rather than as deciding issues that you haven't already decided. You can have heaps of indicators, they're all of different levels and different priorities and some of them measure quite different quantities. You do need them, but what you need before you have indicators is a very clear definition of what you want to measure and what is important. The mere possession of data doesn't solve your problem. It helps when you know what the problem is and when you've defined what your objectives are. That is the mentality that I think is crucial.

Some governments think that by getting more data, they'll fix the problem. In fact, there is a suggestion in the consultation paper that data always matters in these cases, but it depends on how it's used. You've got to have a framework that describes where you want to go before you can measure it. That's critical. In our Western Australian project we had suggested 12 theme areas, and we suggested 12 leading or key indicators in each, just for the sake of a simple model. Those have to be prioritised according to their importance in terms of achieving wellbeing. That can be done; the Canadian index is an example of that. We helped to develop a model for prioritising the key goals and outcomes in education and so on, with both the community and experts. What we end up with is an index, potentially, in each of the 12 areas.

Some people think that an index is a problem or difficult. I don't think it's an either/or situation. You could have an index of overall progress in New South Wales. You could have 12 indices in areas like health, justice, Indigenous wellbeing and children, and you could have indicators within those that are prioritised so that you are able to rate them according to their importance in achieving the goal. If they're simply taken from statistics

you've already got, they aren't related to the key values and goals you want to achieve. Just because we've got indicators that the ABS have developed for years and years, doesn't mean that they're still very useful. Some of them are not. If the Government is going to go into this venture in New South Wales, it has to budget for the development of this project and for new data, where new data is required. It's a good thing that you've got in the consultation paper a commitment to a data strategy to accompany this so that you'll be able to develop new areas of data.

I come from a background of human rights and democracy. I was on the ABS Measures of Australia's Progress. When we started that project, democracy and government weren't even a main domain of progress. There was considered to be no data anyway, other than things like voting patterns. But we know that in democracy there are a lot of important indicators of success. Some of them have to do with confidence and trust by people, others have to do with things like the representation of women in Parliament and so on and so forth. Internationally there are a lot of frameworks for measuring democracy, and I could take other examples. But they depend on the government deciding, firstly, that they know exactly what is important and, secondly, being prepared to develop indicators. Then the way you package them, the way you present them—annually or whenever—is another question. But you do need the data, and it must be relevant.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: How are you doing, Yvonne and Marwah? Thank you so much for the work you do. I know the MDAA. They are pretty awesome out in Western Sydney. I went through your consultation paper and I agree with what you are talking about in terms of the themes and the subsets that relate to people with disabilities, particularly from CALD backgrounds. Is there any commentary or key salient points you want to put forward pertaining to this that you want the Government to hear?

MARWAH ALMOMANI: I think I'd just really want to highlight the importance of how all the things intersect.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Yes, the interconnectedness of it, definitely.

MARWAH ALMOMANI: And how they all flow through together to create either privilege or disadvantage, particularly in the theme of housing and the cost-of-living crisis. Through our consumers we've seen an uptake of applications into housing, the consistently long waiting times, and just how vulnerable people with disability and CALD people are when it comes to equitable access to housing.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: On that, I totally agree. I notice that NCOSS—you do good papers, too, by the way. I've read a couple of your papers and I'm very, very impressed. It's very helpful to me to articulate points as it relates to Western Sydney. You've got this distribution of wellbeing. I'd imagine your clients, Yvonne and Marwah, out in Western Sydney—do you feel like wellbeing is different there relative to other parts of Sydney? If so, why?

YVONNE MUNCE: I would agree with you, yes. I would say that the cohort we support face multiple barriers. That includes affordable housing, access to education and employment. It increases their vulnerability, particularly for people with disability. By addressing these issues, what we would like to see is equitable access. It would just be a more inclusive approach.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: You feel that these eight themes, from memory, fit what you are seeing on the ground in Western Sydney?

YVONNE MUNCE: Yes. I suppose what I would comment around the themes is that a lot of the people that we support are not able to afford their rent. We've come across parents who are going without meals so their children can have enough food. Some of the framework in here, they don't even see it as relevant to them. When it comes to having community participation and things like that, they're just on the breadline trying to survive at the moment.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: How do you participate if you can't actually afford to commute there.

YVONNE MUNCE: That's right. If you can't even afford to hop on the train and you can't afford to get a fine for not paying for a train ticket—things like that. They're just subsisting at the moment.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Cara, just on that too—new politician; you come here and you want to try to save the world, you want to try to make Fairfield and Western Sydney better. The hardest thing that I find is how do I go about conceptualising data to simplify the struggles in certain areas where we know they're struggling, to the Government, in order to get the resources. I know that there's the Gini coefficient, and I know that there are various other similar, not exact, sort of indicators, to demonstrate the dispersion. What do you think we should consider, in terms of conceptualising that in a simple manner?

CARA VARIAN: As a very simple start, I haven't seen the word "poverty" in this document, and that's something that needs to be defined and measured. There are other measures, around wealth inequality or equality and social inclusion or social exclusion, that have been put forward in other States and other international environments that would also be useful. But one thing that could be included from an NCOSS perspective is the rates of poverty in different parts of New South Wales and different demographics, because we know that that is in itself a determinant for health outcomes, life outcomes, justice outcomes. It will help work out where to put services and infrastructure, and we can see already that New South Wales is a deeply unequal place, depending on where you live, and I think that's something we have to fix as a community.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Your papers do highlight that.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Can I just jump in on that, Ms Varian, and maybe, Mr Salvaris, you will have some insight into that from your perspective in Western Australia and Canada. My suspicion, giving the State Government the benefit of the doubt on this, is the reason why no-one has put that into the discussion paper is because people would say issues of poverty and food insecurity are actually Federal Government issues, they're not State Government issues. I don't subscribe to that view. But I do think that there is a risk that, by having a State Government framework that looks at the responsibilities that are State-offered services, we potentially don't look at what are the real causes of wellbeing or health issues. I would imagine our friends from the multicultural disability association would have similar input, in terms of the NDIS realities, where the biggest stressors, the biggest causes of harm and lack of wellbeing for people in New South Wales may indeed be things that the State Government isn't responsible for. I am not suggesting that there aren't some that are.

I wonder if you have thoughts on how we navigate this, because people's lives don't exist in the silos of local, State or Federal government, and how you would see the role of the New South Wales Government's wellbeing framework being able to measure things like poverty rather than—I note the State finances being robust, which I don't imagine the average punter would feel is an indicator of how their wellbeing is. I'm curious as to how you see those things intersecting, because I think a lot of the issues with the paper is actually that it's looking at the State Government things and not seeing the intersection between State Government responsibilities and bigger issues around poverty, income support, NDIS et cetera.

CARA VARIAN: I think it goes back to the comment made earlier, which is we need to define what we're trying to aim for. We live in Australia. There are going to be three levels of government for any foreseeable future. Understanding the context is important for State governments to make decisions, even if they can't necessarily control every lever that can address it. But we did see at the last budget the Treasurer make some policy decisions around GP payroll tax. That was a direct reflection of the New South Wales Government's view about Federal Government's approach to GP accessibility. Measuring whole-of-community wellbeing and inclusion, and equity and fairness enables State governments to make decisions. Also, they have a role to engage with the local and Federal governments about the lives of people that live in New South Wales. So my view is that measures need to be holistic. How we knock the government levers together and intersect them is the next step of that process.

MIKE SALVARIS: Can I support that position that Cara's put in answer to your previous question. I think there is an issue, in the consultation paper, that's not resolved, and that is the conflict between using indicators to measure the outcomes and the condition of people from New South Wales, on one hand, and, secondly, to measure the success of government programs. That's a different issue entirely. Government programs can sometimes be actually contravening or counteracting people's wellbeing, although they try not to be. But the question that's most important in a framework like this is, "What are the actual conditions of people, from a perspective of wellbeing, sustainability and equity and so on?" I think that's got to be stated very categorically when this is developed, that that is what it's trying to do. The fact that some things are outside the State Government's control is just something you have to accept, because the State Government can, I'm sure, quite readily defend itself when, for instance, more complex poverty indicators, of which there are many—and they don't just look at income poverty. The Oxford poverty index is about people's opportunities. That's a very important dimension. The State Government could easily defend itself by saying, "The Feds aren't giving enough grants and so on, and there's all of these other things."

I think one thing to be considered when you develop your framework is trying to create some sort of uniformity both from a State basis and across different local governments. One of the things we're wrestling with in the WA model is can we create a State wellbeing framework that can be broken down by region and local governments. We know that the data isn't always available. But, basically, the model is the same because the aspirations for people are more or less the same. The physical features of different regions and municipalities might be different; therefore the opportunities and resources are different. But I think it is an important aspirational goal for something like this, especially if you see it as a long-term reform in government, and it is; it's a major shift in the paradigm of government. If you see it that way and are prepared to invest in it long term, then the idea

of a framework that is translatable to different municipalities and that is more detailed in some areas when it needs to be, such as poverty—and I do notice that in the consultation indicators, in all 120 of them, there is no poverty index. The Gini is an inequality index. It's not actual poverty level. So I think you've got to consider those things as a design issue.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Dr Alan, looking through your paper—and thanks so much for your submission—you state:

ANA suggests also including indicators of cultural and creative *participation*, to complement other proposed *attendance* indicators.

Can you just elaborate on that, please?

ALAN HUI: Absolutely. In terms of why we're proposing that? Is that right?

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Yes, and the nuts and bolts of it.

ALAN HUI: Okay. We're bringing that up because our Middle Australia research shows that Australians believe cultural and creative engagement are the building blocks of community, connection and place. It helps to bring communities together. It breaks down barriers between different social groups. It encourages greater communication and social cohesion. You only need to look at Melbourne in the last couple of days or Sydney around the time of the Sydney Opera House, what was being illuminated there, to see that social cohesion is a live issue. So that is part of why we've proposed that.

In terms of the nuts and bolts, we've proposed some particular indicators. The ABS cultural participation and attendance survey is something that we're proposing as a potential indicator of cultural and creative participation. From our point of view, that's an obvious place to look. It already exists. It measures one of the things that affects community and social cohesion. That is one of things we have proposed to you. The good thing is it's annual, so if New South Wales decides to report annually on this particular indicator then it's ready to go. Of course, we proposed a few others. There are some of those that are three-yearly, though, and I think the Federal reporting at the moment looks like it might three years as well, but they have asked the ABS to do some extra reporting on an annual basis.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I think it's important because social isolation and loneliness is a big thing. Some of the studies I have read were that one in four people in New South Wales experience some form of loneliness. When you look at culturally and linguistically diverse groups, that isolation aspect, particularly because of a lack of digital inclusion and other things, comes to the fray. Have you thought about that in terms of the linkages there with cultural and creative participation in terms of getting CALD groups and alleviating loneliness and isolation?

ALAN HUI: Yes, absolutely. Cultural and creative participation is helpful for all groups. Kate, feel free to jump in here. I'm remembering from the National Arts Participation Survey that it has particular results on attendance—I think it's CALD Australians. It says that they're actually more likely to attend certain cultural events, but they tend to attend the ones that are from their cultural group or with their cultural group. There are some differences in the way that Australians from different cultural groups might participate, but overall the participation is helpful for wellbeing.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: That would be level with the MDDA as well—the barriers to connectivity.

YVONNE MUNCE: That's right. What we've noticed around CALD communities and disability is that the loneliness is exacerbated, particularly because there's stigma in some cultures around having disability and then internalised shame. That will often affect or determine whether they will interact with their cultural groups or any kind of community participation activities.

The CHAIR: I'm conscious of time, but I have two burning questions that I have been left with. One is for NCOSS. You mention in your submission that as much as possible this framework should be integrated into the budget process and in Government decision-making. I'm interested in your views about what the mechanism for that might be. How might that happen? Mr Salvaris, you say in an ideal world—I think this is happening in Canada. It was a five-year process where you started off with asking the question, "What sort of Canada do we want?" There was a five-year consultation. It was a co-design process. I think, practically, it's unlikely that New South Wales will go back to the drawing board and restart the process again. We have a consultation paper and a set of metrics. What is a blended approach? Given where we are now and given we've announced this framework, how do we bring the community with us whilst not starting from scratch and waiting five years to come to an outcome? Maybe we could start with Cara first and then come to that second question.

CARA VARIAN: I won't pretend to be an expert on the machinery of government, but my thoughts on this are that we have a Cabinet because as a society we understand that solo decision-making is not as good as collective decision-making. From a social service perspective and addressing poverty, we see in particular the important intersection between justice, health, education and the social services. We see that in areas where they

work together—and south-west Sydney is a really good example of a place where the different parts of those departments will come together to make joint decision-making about objectives. If we could see that happening at a secretary level—I guess that goes back to why it's really important to have great measures so that those senior decision-makers are coming together to say how can each of the departments contribute to that for a one-year forward estimates cycle.

MIKE SALVARIS: If I can answer your question, Mr Li, I think it's important to start off with realising what this task is about. It isn't about assembling as quickly as possible a bunch of statistics that Treasury can use; it's about shifting the paradigm of government. It's also about making sure that the citizens themselves accept the validity of this framework—that it is genuinely representing what they want. I think you've said that yourself. I noticed on your website the importance of community wellbeing in Strathfield. You've emphasised the need to build up a strategy over a period of time with citizen engagement. That's exactly the same exercise, except at a local scale, as the one that I think you're potentially facing here in New South Wales.

There is no reason to say that the whole thing has to be done at one go, because it's iterative. Someone else said that—it's an iterative process. It's a major shift. There are lots of examples of how you can involve citizens. If you want to do it—if you're really committed to involving citizens so that you end up with something like a shared vision for New South Wales, for the State you want, which is actually subscribed to by most people, which is comprehensively stated and measured—then you've got to invest the time and resources in it. The fact that it's being driven by Treasury, and rather urgently, might perhaps mean that some of the other longer term aspects are not being sufficiently given weight to.

The CHAIR: This might be a slightly controversial question, but even though it's imperfect as it is, there is value in measuring things that are not currently measured. I think that the intent of the Finance Minister and the Treasurer is to implement at least some aspect of this for the 2025 budget, which is essentially next year. They want to start doing this for next year. Is your proposition that this should wait and that there should not be this until a proper community consultation can happen, which may take another year or two years or three years? Or would you accept that we can get some form of this out now and then it can be improved over time?

MIKE SALVARIS: No, it wouldn't be—absolutely. I may have given the wrong impression of the Canadian budget because they didn't go five years and do nothing. What they did was release what they had. The plans for the development of this should be your next step. It's logical. "How are we going to do this, how it's going to be used, how it's going to be built for the Government, these are our main themes, these are some of the things we want discussion on, these are the things we feel confident about"—you can do that straightaway. You can do it budget by budget. You can make sure that there are more steps. But you have to accept that it's, at a minimum, a five-year process—not because we're dragging our feet, but because the community doesn't work as quickly as bureaucracy. The idea of it is difficult, a lot of people would be unhappy about this idea, there is data that we don't have and so on. See it that way, and then divide it into stages. That's what we've done in Western Australia. We've got five stages. Each stage has a deliverable at the end of the year—a report and some progress to show. I think, if you want to make this a best practice project, which I understand you do, that's the way you should do it.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Maybe you can take this on notice. The more that we're hearing from groups that are representing vulnerable people, who are feeling like the services that are offered by the State are not currently working and supporting them in the way they need to, it's almost like the paper we have before us and the priorities and the indicators set by Government, to go to the point that was made earlier, are a measure of how effective or not are the government programs that we're currently running and are they contributing to people's wellbeing or not, rather than what is a definition of wellbeing for people in the community and then how would we reshape government programs to deliver for them.

To that point around the stages, if this is the first stage—looking at things like if the State finances are robust and sustainable, the markets are fair and competitive, and workplaces are safe, which seem to be more at an institutional or a government-service level—it would be great to get some indicators of what you think would be, from a person-centred perspective, the measures in each of those thematic areas. I take the Chair's point that the Government and the Treasurer are keen to move quickly on it, but potentially the Public Accounts Committee, and potentially through that, the Auditor-General's office, can have a role in looking at what is the people-centred element of those measures. I want to put on notice that if people have thoughts around that, it would be great to get your perspective on it, because there may be a way that those other bodies can have a role in taking a more holistic approach in how we measure how this is working.

The CHAIR: Or, as Mr Salvaris was saying, it could be that stage one is about measuring the effectiveness of government programs and service delivery—the nuts and bolts sort of thing—but the larger

aspiration of how do we actually improve the wellbeing of people who live in New South Wales, that big aspirational piece, is a stage two piece that is done over time. That may be another one.

Ms JENNY LEONG: To the point made around the funding necessary to do that, the commitment of the Treasurer would be to identify funding to undertake that, so the next budget would have the funding to undertake that comprehensive consultation with the community about what wellbeing would look like.

The CHAIR: Are there any other questions or comments that anybody would like to make? If not, thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. You will each be provided with a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these answers within 14 days.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

Mr WARWICK SMITH, Research Director, Wellbeing Economy, the Centre for Policy Development, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms DIANE BOWLES, Policy Adviser, Wellbeing Government, the Centre for Policy Development, affirmed and examined

Dr ANDY ASQUITH, Research Officer, Public Service Association of NSW, affirmed and examined

Associate Professor MELISSA PARSONS, Associate Professor in Physical Geography, Department of Geography and Planning, University of New England, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms SARAH MARLAND, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms DAMIYA HAYDEN, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Community Legal Centres NSW, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I'd like to welcome our next witnesses. Thanks for appearing before the Public Accounts Committee today to give evidence. Can you each confirm that you've been issued with the Committee's terms of reference and information about the standing orders that relate to the examination of witnesses?

DAMIYA HAYDEN: Yes, Chair.

SARAH MARLAND: Yes.

ANDY ASQUITH: Yes.

DIANE BOWLES: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions about this information?

DAMIYA HAYDEN: No.

SARAH MARLAND: No.

ANDY ASQUITH: No.

DIANE BOWLES: No.

The CHAIR: Would anybody like to make a brief opening statement before we go to questions?

DIANE BOWLES: Thank you very much for inviting us to participate today. The Centre for Policy Development is an independent, nonpartisan public policy institute with staff in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, and Jakarta, and a network of experts across the Indo-Pacific region. We work across the connected themes of wellbeing economy, social service delivery, just transitions and forced migration, with a view to tackling the biggest challenges facing Australian policymaking.

In the Wellbeing Government team, we work with governments at all levels, including the Federal Treasury and the Measuring What Matters team. We work closely with the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance and the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF) team, and have a developing relationship with New South Wales Treasury, the Cabinet Office and other line agencies. We were co-organisers of the Building Wellbeing into Policy and Action conference held in Canberra in June, where we had great representation from the Federal and New South Wales governments in wellbeing government. We also work with multilateral organisations such as the OECD and the Wellbeing Economy Alliance.

We'd like to start by referring to the terms of reference in your Committee of accountability and transparency. In our recommendations, which you would have seen, we've asked for a deep and inclusive consultation process with the people of New South Wales. I heard Mike Salvaris, who I work with, speak. He explained it very well, so I don't really need to go on. But we believe that you really need to find out from the people what their goals are and what they believe wellbeing is to them. It needs to be accessible, inclusive, statewide, including regional and disability and people whose voices aren't heard. The process so far has been with people who are already involved in this work and research in this area. I would imagine that the average resident of New South Wales wouldn't know about the Performance and Wellbeing Framework, so we think it would be best that this is expanded. Listening earlier to you, Mr Li, maybe that two-stage process would be a good way to go.

We have tabled today two papers for you. *A national conversation on Measuring What Matters in Australia* is a way that we could go forward in New South Wales as a way to do that consultation. The benefits of

broad-based, multimodal consultation are numerous. The details of why and how are in the paper. To reflect different processes, we are also tabling *Banking the benefits*, which explores changes in budget processes to be longer term and consider second-round fiscal effects. Finally, we congratulate you on the First Nations economic prosperity and wellbeing box on page 18 of the consultation paper. We think that this is an appropriate lens for prosperity and wellbeing for all of the people of New South Wales, not only First Nations. We have been working with NSW Treasury from an early stage, and we hope to continue contributing to the ongoing process.

SARAH MARLAND: First of all, I'd like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, whose land we are meeting on today, and note that sovereignty was never ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Community Legal Centres NSW is the peak body for 41 community legal centres across New South Wales, and we provide free legal assistance for people experiencing deep and persistent disadvantage and dislocation. Timely and universal access to legal assistance is important and crucial to social and economic wellbeing but, in our experience, this is not reflected in budget decisions. Currently, a major barrier to ensuring that people experiencing violence, insecurity, discrimination and inclusion have equitable access to legal support is the serious underfunding of community legal centres relative to demand, which results in people being turned away and difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. These both compound each other and result in social and economic harm for people who need support the most.

This also has a downstream impact on the New South Wales budget by issues escalating in the child protection, court and criminal legal systems. Our submission contains suggestions for wellbeing indicators related to legal need and timely access to justice, including regular surveying and reporting on unmet legal need; ensuring that everywhere in New South Wales is covered by a community legal centre; including timely resolution of disputes at New South Wales Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) as an indicator; including specific indicators of wellbeing for renters; ensuring that data is disaggregated by social group and geography to demonstrate whether increased wellbeing is being equitably distributed; and reforming State institutions and systems to promote safety and enable the reliable collection of data on abuse and mistreatment in custodial and institutional settings.

DAMIYA HAYDEN: I agree with Sarah. I would say that the object of a wellbeing framework is to have it inform budgeting and policy-making. As Sarah mentioned, there are downstream impacts of inequality and precarity in the underfunding of services that prevent situations escalating into crisis. That then creates a greater need for crisis responses. Knowing the causes of crisis situations and the amount of crisis interventions that are being made helps you make crisis less likely. It means making budgeting and policy decisions that promote housing stability, reduce poverty, change unsafe government systems and support organisations and community groups that prevent or mitigate crisis. It's important to understand what a political decision is in those processes. Data is not the be-all and end-all. As one of our colleagues in the earlier session said, processes like this shouldn't be an excuse to delay reforms or funding decisions that we already know need to be made.

ANDY ASQUITH: I'd like to pick up on what my colleagues have said. At the Public Service Association, we represent over 40,000 public servants across the State. Our organisation and its members exist to pursue the wellbeing of people throughout New South Wales. The work that our members do is increasingly difficult because of the fragmentation within the public sector in New South Wales. In the submission that we made, we highlighted some of the shortcomings and some ways forward. We're very happy to be able to talk about these today.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. We'll move to questions from the Committee. Before I begin the questions, I wish to inform witnesses that they may wish to take a question on notice and provide the Committee with an answer in writing within 14 days after receiving the questions. I might pass to the Committee.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I just wanted to check: Did Associate Professor Parsons wish to make an opening statement? She is not part of one of the organisations represented in the room.

MELISSA PARSONS: No, I'm okay. Thank you.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I wasn't sure whether we got that at the beginning. The first question I wanted to ask comes out in the Public Service Association submission, but I think it goes across the board in terms of people's perspectives on where we're at. It's the issue around the potential for harm of existing government processes, either through privatisation, through outsourcing, through fragmentation, through siloing or, indeed, the harm caused by some government programs or institutions themselves that impact on wellbeing. I'd like to take, for example, the idea of public housing maintenance, which causes harm and stress to the people who are the members of Dr Asquith's organisation who are trying to navigate this from distressed clients but also from the people who are vulnerable and living in public housing. That institution is, in effect, a State government agency that is causing harm to people as they try to engage with that process. We also know that if it goes well, it adds significantly to people's wellbeing.

What I'm concerned about is how we capture the intersection of what might be an outsourced contractor who is privatised to do a thing, versus an in-house call centre, versus someone calling and needing drug and alcohol support from their Sydney local health district. I worry that what we have got here is a whole lot of siloed measures and indicators that do not recognise that the harm being caused to this person is the frustration that when they wait for an hour on hold, get put through to someone and someone comes who is a contracted tradie and discovers they have a family violence situation, that tradie has no ability to assist or support that individual because they're completely siloed. I use that as a hypothetical, but we know these intersections happen all the time.

I'm keen to know, taking a step back, how do we start addressing what are the intersections of those things and the harm created in people's lives in a way where we're saying to Treasury, "We want to measure these things for the wellbeing outcomes; we don't want to measure whether or not your individual indicators are being met"? I'm keen to know how you would provide guidance to be able to look at it from a people-centred perspective. Maybe I go to you first, Dr Asquith, and then we can go to the others.

ANDY ASQUITH: I think the first step that needs to be taken is there needs to be a single Minister responsible for the issue of housing and family services. At the moment, you have multiple departments, each having their fingers in the pie. No-one knows who is doing what. There is very little strategic coordination, if any. There is no ownership, so things are just allowed to go round and round without being tackled.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I hear you, Dr Asquith. In terms of these measures, what would you see, from your members' perspective—and maybe others want to jump in—as the needs to give as changes to Treasury and how they're approaching these themes?

ANDY ASQUITH: I go back to my original statement: There needs to be, essentially, a single person where the buck stops. You go back in history to when Aneurin Bevan created the health service in Britain. He put a structure in place where he, as the Minister, was ultimately accountable and responsible. That doesn't seem to be the case here. We need our political leaders to step up. The buck stops with them.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Ms Bowles, did you want to come in?

DIANE BOWLES: I'd love to throw to Warwick because he has got his hand up.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Sorry, I missed the hand.

WARWICK SMITH: No worries. The hybrid thing is always tricky. I think there are a couple of different answers to your question from our perspective. One is that the best of wellbeing frameworks are holistic frameworks. We looked around the world and in Australia at these kinds of frameworks, and one of the stand-out examples was in Wales. The Welsh Well-being of Future Generations Act has seven overarching wellbeing goals that were developed out of a national conversation with the people of Wales, and it requires every government authority to work towards achieving all seven of the goals. You're not saying, "Here's our transport goal; we give that to the transport department. Here's our health goal; we give that to the health department." Rather all of the departments and all of the agencies in fact, right down to local sporting authorities, if they're government agencies, are working towards all of the goals. By doing that, you do break down some of those silos that you're talking about.

The other thing I would say is Di mentioned the *Banking the benefits* paper, which is really written specifically with Commonwealth government budgeting in mind but is absolutely relevant to State government budgeting too. That paper advocates for making sure that we calculate second-round fiscal effects as distinct from second-round economic effects, so the sort of roll-on effects for the budget of particular decisions. If we are making a decision to cut a service or to implement something and that has a roll-on effect for the provision of other services, even by other departments, we make sure that we count that. I think that's where some of what you're talking about would really become counted within a process like this. If it was holistic enough so that we can see that if we're not housing people properly, then we'll see an increase in emergency presentations at hospitals—if that is counted as a cost, then we can see that, actually, maintaining those houses is fiscally worthwhile as well as from a wellbeing perspective. That's just a couple of answers to that question.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Ms Marland or Ms Hayden, did you want to step in?

DAMIYA HAYDEN: I think only to say that—I might be stepping back even further than the question—it's a choice to pursue a wellbeing framework rather than something like an audit of how economic, social and cultural rights have been integrated into domestic law. This is a specific way of saying, "We have a project about making society better. How are we going to do it? We're going to measure wellbeing," rather than, "We're going to go through and look at all of these international instruments we've signed but not actually put them in the law so that the Government has to promote those rights." You made me think about framing in general.

The CHAIR: Professor Parsons, did you have a comment? You had your hand up.

MELISSA PARSONS: I just wanted to talk to the fragmentation and siloing point. It is a well-known barrier to a lot of delivery of government services. As the world becomes more complex and interconnected in terms of the problems that society is facing, that becomes even more important. The biggest barriers are governance and institutions, and we know some of this. There's not a lot of research on how those governance, institutional and legislative barriers create or can enhance the siloing.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Nice to see you again, Dr Andy. I saw your name and was like, "I know who Andy is." A question for you: There were submissions earlier on today pertaining to the New Zealand Government's approach to wellbeing and its factoring in their budget. I noticed in your submission you stated:

> Ultimately, the way in which the concepts were implemented in practice and incorporated into the budgetary and wider policy making processes were deemed to have failed.

I don't know much about this. Could you elaborate on what you meant by that?

ANDY ASQUITH: I had the pleasure of living through it. I lived there. Despite my accent, I'm a Kiwi. It was a classic example of marketing over substance. You may recall when Jacinda Ardern became New Zealand Prime Minister, she said her priority was to reduce child poverty. When she left office, it had gone up.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Sorry, I didn't hear that. What was that?

ANDY ASQUITH: When she left office, the child poverty rate had increased. A lot of noise was made about the wellbeing budget in New Zealand being a world first, but, as Warwick has pointed out, the Welsh had been there, I think, since 2015. There was nothing new, and the policy outcomes that they achieved were failures in New Zealand. Part of the problem was, without wanting to get into a history lesson—

Dr DAVID SALIBA: What are the learnings that we should look at?

ANDY ASQUITH: Fragmentation is bad. We're back to fragmentation again. The New Zealand model was assessed in the late '90s by an American academic called Schick. He basically said the problem with New Zealand was everything is siloed, each agency and department is working to its own specific objectives and there is no joined-up government whatsoever. That still continues. Within New South Wales, that's a big issue because of the dog's breakfast inherited by the Labor administration last year.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: How about work with, say, Wales? I know that yourself and Warwick looked at the Welsh example. Is it similar? Any successes? Any limitations?

DIANE BOWLES: Can I just go back to New Zealand because I think that's important. There were a couple of things that New Zealanders tell us now they wish they would've done. The biggest one is that national conversation first. It didn't happen. It was just done by the Government. What that meant is there was no buy-in, there wasn't bipartisanship or multi-partisanship and that democratic mandate. That's really important, and that's why a lot of us are saying that's what we need here in New South Wales to make it sustainable and effective.

The second thing is, in Wales, as Warwick mentioned, there is a culture change. There are the five ways of working and collaborating, and it's long term and it's prevention, and you have to look at all seven goals. Even the Early Intervention Investment Framework in Victoria, they look at ways to collaborate between the two agencies. I think it's really about looking at the process. One of the things that we're doing—and some work looking at embedding wellbeing is a real key piece of this—is culture change. ACT is also a leader in that area right now about leading that culture change and getting the buy-in of everyone.

ANDY ASQUITH: If I can just come back for a moment please. One of the things that Diane said was about the lack of general buy-in and consultation in New Zealand. That was critical. One of the things about Wales, as Warwick pointed out, is that all tiers of government in Wales and all agencies are obliged to engage with the wellbeing framework there. This weekend we've got local elections in New South Wales. Local councils are in the community. They're key to getting people to buy in to what the Government's trying to do. One of the things about the Treasury consultation period that struck me was the lack of local government involvement with this.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: That nests with your point, Professor Parsons, about measuring wellbeing and wellbeing being about place. Do you have any comments there about councils, local governments and places being important there?

MELISSA PARSONS: Wellbeing is influenced by place. Place influences people and people influence place, but it's also part of a system, and so there are a couple of complex things going on when we talk about what influences wellbeing. I think it's really important not to take a "one New South Wales" view on this. This kind of came up in the first point. There is a well-known gradient of health, education, employment, economic and disaster resilience outcomes which decline as you go towards regional and remote New South Wales, so I think it's really

important that this isn't a wellbeing of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong but rather uses a geography that captures the relationships between people and place, because you will have strengths and barriers. In the disaster resilience index that I developed, it was really clear that there were some things that were strengths in some places and barriers in other places. To know that is really important in terms of deciding on investment and priorities and programs and policies.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Finally, to Sarah and Damiya, I totally agree, in terms of the data, that it should not be disaggregated. But that aspect of not only looking at localities and areas but also subgroups—for example, marginalised and disadvantaged groups and people living in different areas as well—do you want to add that, particularly in the legal lens that you work in?

SARAH MARLAND: Yes. We know that those things are social determinants of wellbeing. I think Cara talked about that in an earlier session. If you have good housing, good education and employment, these things can lead to better wellbeing. For people who are accessing legal services, particularly in regional areas, rural areas and remote areas, they don't have the same levels of access to justice that people do in the city. If they get a court order that they have to attend some kind of drug and alcohol rehab, if there's no drug and alcohol rehab then they have to leave their families, come into the city and do that. When you're talking about inequality, you have to include what's happening in the regions. The broader service system is all relevant to people's access to justice. Unless you have the data showing that and unless you're disaggregating it by where people are living and by what their different kind of status is, then you're not going to know that.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: That's the issue; it's complex. How do we go about it? As you say, there are different areas, different stakeholders and different groups. You put it in there in terms of government versus non-government entities. How do you go about coordinating? Who has done it well? Have the Welsh done it well? Have they coordinated all the different governments and non-government actors there to collect the data, to conceptualise the goals and to deliver?

ANDY ASQUITH: Of the examples of wellbeing that are of import and in operation, the Welsh one is the one that I would hold up as the closest to best practice.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Why? Can you elaborate?

ANDY ASQUITH: It wasn't something that was imposed top down. There was a conversation; it was thought through. It didn't just appear out of a top hat somewhere, and the extent to which different agencies are involved. I think, as well, it probably helps that Wales, and Scotland as well, haven't gone down the neoliberal road as much as England has, in terms of fragmenting the public service. If things are in-house, it's much easier to coordinate and put together a bold and cunning plan that means the public service is able to deliver what they're supposed to deliver.

WARWICK SMITH: I want to add a little bit about Wales. There are a few things that have helped them to be successful. Part of it is the legislative framework—legislating the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which also brought into being the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. So there is an independent, resourced body, and individual in the Commissioner, that not only monitors government for implementation but also helps government agencies with the implementation, and it acts as an adviser to organisations outside of government—so not-for-profits. In fact, more recently, as they see the Welsh people really start to embrace the framework, they've had private enterprises come to the Future Generations Commission to ask, "How can we align ourselves with the well-being of future generations Act?" It's good for business to be seen to be doing that.

Those are all elements that have made that successful. I also think there's potentially a confusion of things that we're talking about here. I think a budgeting framework like this is probably aiming to do three closely related but separate things. One of them is to inspire and incentivise different kinds of policy proposals, so right back at what is the problem we're trying to solve and what's the question we're asking here as public servants. We want those proposals to better align with wellbeing goals and to be more holistic in their thinking. We've talked about silos here a lot. So greater cross-departmental collaboration, more long-term thinking and a greater focus on prevention so that we're not just treating a few problems but we're preventing problems from occurring in the first place. We want the framework, I think, to inspire and incentivise changes at that level.

The next role of this framework is providing a tool for the Expenditure Review Committee to make decisions about proposals and about whether to endorse them or not. That's a related but separate function of the framework. Then the last one is that the framework should form the basis of a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. That's the performance part. That's different again. I think you really do want to make sure that that latter part, the performance part, the monitoring and evaluation, is not cookie cutter; it's not the same thing for everything and you're not going to expect to have a 50-metric dashboard that can cover the outcomes of anything

the Government might want to do. You just want that framework to be enabling rather than constraining, I think, as a part of that end part, that there are more things than are in the dashboard, and that that's okay and that they can be accounted for within some kind of well-constructed monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, which is really what the performance framework is about.

The CHAIR: Warwick, just following up on that—and maybe this is for Diane as well—given the work you've been doing with the Commonwealth, with Measuring What Matters, where do you think the New South Wales framework is fundamentally different to the Commonwealth? Where should it be fundamentally different?

DIANE BOWLES: I will go to the first part of that, which is how it aligns and is it meeting the same measurements or looking at it. As I've heard from previous colleagues, there is a two-step framework in New South Wales being proposed with wellbeing and performance, whereas Measuring What Matters is really more about what Warwick was just saying—the inspirational and the aspirational. If you look at the prosperous theme, you would see that they have included more into what that is, and their indicators, which are more about wellbeing. I have heard it mentioned already that poverty hasn't been mentioned in this framework, and income inequality is in Measuring What Matters. There are some differences on really not just how the State performs and delivers services but, rather, that inspirational side of the wellbeing framework. I hope that answers your question.

The CHAIR: Are you saying that the Commonwealth framework is meant to be more inspirational, whereas the New South Wales is meant to be more practical and service delivery focused?

DIANE BOWLES: I'm not saying it's meant to be. I'm saying the way it's proposed now, I would say that Measuring What Matters is a little bit more encompassing in their themes to look at wellbeing as a whole.

The CHAIR: I guess this goes to the heart of my question. If you look at Wales as a country, if we take a national approach, you would have a Commonwealth framework, and then if that Commonwealth framework is truly comprehensive and brings the nation with us, then you would have a cascading—the State level and the local government level would be aligned to that. It would cascade down the levels of government and everything would be aligned. Whereas, if they're not aligned and if New South Wales goes off and does its own thing, there is a risk that we are not aligned with the Commonwealth stuff. If each State has its own wellbeing framework, the whole thing is a dog's breakfast and not aligned nationally. I guess that's the nub of my question. This seems to be where it is at the moment. New South Wales is more service delivery; the Commonwealth framework is more aspirational. Are there intrinsic differences, or should the State model really be a plug-in to the national model or be part and parcel of the national model, or does it not matter?

DIANE BOWLES: You mention Wales, and it's a small country, but we have a federated system here, which is very different and which kind of changes the way we do things. I think it's important that it is aligned. I might throw this over to Warwick and see if he might have something to add, because he would probably have more.

WARWICK SMITH: I'm happy to, but I see Melissa has had her hand up for a while, I presume, in response to this question.

The CHAIR: Please, Melissa.

MELISSA PARSONS: I'm an academic, so I see aspiration to mean "conceptually rigorous". I think New South Wales shouldn't be afraid to lead here, because they're leading in some other ways. The new disaster adaptation planning is a really good example of that. They're taking some risks and being a bit daring in that regard. I would say that New South Wales has an opportunity here to be a bit daring. What can happen here is, if you don't have a really good conceptual tether for what I see are all those indicators in that framework, you end up with a self-referential logic where wellbeing becomes simply what you can get hold of to measure rather than this idea of what wellbeing actually is in 2024.

Some of the models that we've been talking about here have been around for a long time. In a way, they're embedded. But they also need to be re-looked at in terms of their relevance to society for how it is today. I've got notes here and what I think is missing from that is that our society would be equal, it would be climate adaptive, it would be just and it would be resilient. They're newish things that have come out in the last five or six years or so that are latent dimensions of wellbeing that weren't around when all that really innovative work started happening.

Something I said in my submission was that I think it's really important to start with a look at the conceptual model of what wellbeing is, what it means and what we want it to look like in New South Wales, and then to populate it with data. What that data looks like might be some existing data that we already have, but also this idea of asking people so that perceptions-type research and work is—and there are some surveys that do that,

like the ABS General Social Survey and the Regional Wellbeing Survey, to ask what wellbeing actually looks like from a direct ask versus a top-down, latent dimension approach. I would say New South Wales should be a bit more daring in leading here.

The CHAIR: Andy?

ANDY ASQUITH: This might be a flippant observation, and I apologise, but the last speaker spoke about the idea of a more just and fair and equal society. It strikes me that, if you go back 40, 50 or 60 years, Australia, New Zealand and the UK were deemed to be more equal and the gap between rich and poor was much smaller. The further down the neoliberal road we've gone, the wider that gap has become and the more unjust society has become. Perhaps the first thing we ought to do is put the brake on the neoliberal stuff and push back a little bit.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Can I jump in off the back of that? I might ask Ms Marland, but others can jump in as well. Earlier we heard from the Advocate for Children and Young People and she referred to the fact that we already have an existing international framework around human rights obligations. Arguably, if we had a situation where the Government was meeting those human rights obligations, we would have less need to be developing wellbeing frameworks because we would have a way of ensuring that people are living with equity and dignity and respect to the other elements that were just identified then by Associate Professor Parsons. Can you talk about how you see the potential for integrating what are those international obligations into either this work or more broadly into the work of the New South Wales Government? I'm keen to hear from others in relation to that as well.

SARAH MARLAND: The goal of the human rights framework is to live with dignity, which, fundamentally, for me, is what wellbeing is. It's easy to say what dignity is not, rather than what dignity is. It's not living in a violent relationship. It's not about experiencing discrimination. It's not about being a kid who's under the age of 14 and getting jailed. It's not about living in unsafe, insecure housing or being homeless. It's not having legal problems spiral out of control because you don't have access to legal advice. That is what it means to not live a dignified life, and that means that you don't have wellbeing. These are all the concerns of a human rights framework.

A human rights framework is useful because it works on a few different levels. They are minimum standards which governments could use as goals for where they're trying to get to—these minimum standards. It can be used as a measure in tracking and how the Government is going to achieve them. And there's also a progressive realisation and the steps that governments can take to actually get to that point where there is a realisation of human rights. For me, that is what wellbeing is all about. That would be how you get to having a sense of dignity and living and wellbeing.

DAMIYA HAYDEN: Could I just add to that with a reference to something in our submission, which is the optional protocol to the convention against torture? That is an international instrument that is designed to prevent abuse in custodial settings and places where people are deprived of their liberty. New South Wales has not implemented that, apparently on the basis of budget issues—"The Commonwealth signed the treaty, therefore the Commonwealth should pay for it and we're not going to pay for it." That goes directly to a human rights framework. We don't have data about wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in society who are deprived of their liberty because a budget decision was made.

We're very concerned about the wellbeing of the most vulnerable people. A lot of our clients are either in crisis or teetering on the edge of crisis. You had things in the past where—the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended getting rid of all the hanging points in prisons. There are still hundreds and hundreds of cells that have hanging points in them, even though there have been hundreds of billions of dollars spent on capital works in the prison system. To my mind, when we're thinking about wellbeing budgeting and human rights and how they intersect, implementing these oversight mechanisms that have been established and that have clear recommendations about, "Here is how you structure a custodial inspection regime"—there is stuff already that could be done. Anyway, I think I have kind of gone off track.

Ms JENNY LEONG: That's great. It's good to have that as an example of where the intersection between obligations, wellbeing and then budget decisions are made and how those intersect. Mr Smith, did you want to come in with something?

WARWICK SMITH: Yes, just quickly. It's in relation to that. I agree with what the last two speakers have said about a rights-based approach. I think there is absolute merit in maintaining that rights-based approach that sets baselines for expectations. The way that we, at least at the Centre for Policy Development, talk about wellbeing government approaches is modifying the mechanisms and the processes of government so that we are, in fact, more likely to achieve the things that the last few speakers have been talking about. The principles of

wellbeing government, as I said earlier, involve better holistic thinking. How do we structure the process of government so that the departments do work together so there is that joined up thinking and joined up action and more of a focus on that end purpose rather than, "I'm just delivering a service"?

And then there's the preventative approach and always thinking upstream. As our colleague Katherine Trebeck likes to say, channel our inner three-year-old and constantly ask, "Why? Why? Why?" until you get to the top and until you get to the highest intervention point so we can prevent problems from occurring in the first place and have an economy that works better for people up-front. Often the result is you save money in government expenditure and you're achieving multiple things at the same time. For that example of people having good housing, there are so many downstream effects in people having safe and secure housing. Rather than saying, "How do we improve the output of emergency departments?" it's more, "How do we stop people from presenting themselves to emergency departments in the first place?"

Going back to the Welsh example, Sophie Howe was the first Future Generations Commissioner in Wales. We brought her to Australia last year. One of the things she would often say is that you need to identify your frustrated champions in the public service. There are people who know that things can be done better, and they can see how it can be done better, but the system won't let them. So part of a wellbeing framework, really, is about creating an authorising environment for those frustrated champions to make connections between disparate things and to get those co-benefits when you do things in a holistic way. That is how I see the difference—in a wellbeing approach to government as opposed to a metrics system that is about how do we measure wellbeing. I think those two things are quite distinct, too.

The CHAIR: Just an observation, going back to Andy's comments about why it failed in New Zealand—because it wasn't joined up, there was no joined-up government and there were too many silos—it strikes me that so many of the problems that we are facing as a government today require a collaborative approach. Not any one department can solve it. So in that sense, wellbeing government is not something special. It is certainly not some sort of kumbaya, motherhood kind of notion. It's essentially good government, or it is essentially the sort of good government one needs to tackle the complex challenges that we face today like housing, like domestic violence, like all of these issues.

ANDY ASQUITH: Yesterday I was at the Housing Now! Conference in Parramatta. One of the things that struck me about everything I heard yesterday was—there was one panel with the Minister for Planning on it and his Secretary was there, as well. The Secretary spoke about the way in which the Minister was pushing a change in the culture of the department. One of the things that really struck me was—my background is that I am a local government specialist. I'm masquerading here today as something else. The Secretary made a point in terms of trying to overhaul the planning mechanisms of New South Wales. They were working with Newcastle council. They'd streamlined their planning system quite a lot to make it much easier to get new builds go through the process. That level of collaboration was something that really struck me. It can be done and it is being done. But I appreciate that the public service in New South Wales is basically being rebuilt from the ground up because of the devastation created by the previous Liberal coalition. So it can be done, it is being done, but it will take time. You can't turn an oil tanker around on a two-cent coin.

SARAH MARLAND: I would also like to make the point that government services are not just delivered by governments. It's delivered by a lot of community organisations and NGOs, and certainly what we've experienced is that these community organisations are being starved. They are not sustainable; they haven't been sustainable for a very long time. Unless there is an investment in those, you're not going to be able to achieve any of this because we are not going to be able to deliver the services that you need.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I think it is worth us considering what the role is. To Mr Smith's point, in relation to the idea of who are the frustrated champions that know that the culture change is there. The people working on the front line of community legal centres and the people working in the housing departments, having to deal with all of that at the same time, probably speak to each other way more than they would like to because of the completely dysfunctional, underfunded system. Part of this challenge that I think we need to address here—I'm really keen to look at this and, maybe, Dr Asquith, you can take that on notice—is how do we make a distinction between the good supports in the community, like neighbourhood centres and other things, versus the privatisation and outsourcing of what should be a strong public service. The evidence we've received is a lot about the need for a place-based kind of approach to this.

I think we would all agree that there are community-led organisations and community services, which are one thing, which is very different to an outsourced and privatised model. It would be really great to get a bit of guidance as to how this wellbeing framework needs to take into consideration the distinction between those things, so we don't further outsource existing public services but, at the same time, we don't lose the support for community organisations.

ANDY ASQUITH: In terms of community organisations, one of the things that we are finding is that there are lots of very small community organisations in areas such as domestic violence, which is a really topical and good example. They are doing some fantastic work. Alongside that, there are NGOs that are as big as multinational companies. They are sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars of assets and money in the bank that can't be audited by the New South Wales Audit Office. It's not being used to provide essential services for the people out there. If those services were in house and delivered by public servants, there would be accountability through the political system and accountability through the audit system.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I don't disagree with you on that because, as we said, this is a place-based approach. But the thing about it is I've seen big NGOs talk about, for example, refugee services, as it pertains to, say, Fairfield, and get these significant funding programs. I ask them, "Where is your office?" It's nowhere near Western Sydney. So how do you go about engaging? In the digital space? Refugees have digital inclusion problems. I don't discredit it, but I've seen some smaller, not-for-profit groups do amazing work, as well.

DIANE BOWLES: One of the research papers we are working on right now is exactly about this and how you form these partnerships between local government, community organisations, State government and different groups to deliver on-the-ground, in-place community social services? We'll share it with you when it's done.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Please do. I'd love to see it.

The CHAIR: I'm conscious of the time. Are there any other questions for the witnesses? If not, thank you all very much. This has been a terrific session. Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. You'll each be provided with a copy of the transcript of the day's proceedings for corrections. The Committee staff will also email any questions taken on notice from today and any supplementary questions from the Committee. We kindly ask that you return these answers within 14 days. That concludes our public hearing for the day. I thank all the witnesses who have appeared before the Committee. I also thank my fellow Committee members, Committee staff, Hansard and the Parliament's AV team for their help in conducting today's hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:05.