

## Improving wellbeing: case study

# City of Sydney

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### Local government measurement of wellbeing

The City of Sydney is working to build a 'green, global, connected' city. In its strategic plan Sustainable Sydney 2030, it explains 'connected' means more than just interlinking cycleways and free public WIFI.

"It also means connecting people to each other, building communities," said a City spokesperson. "We want residents, workers and visitors to have a sense of belonging when they're here."

The City of Sydney delivers dozens of programs that contribute positively to wellbeing, and funds many others. They range from childcare services and lifelong learning programs, to festivals that celebrate diversity, to programs that encourage local businesses and village centres to thrive.

While the City has implemented such programs for decades, its efforts to formally measure wellbeing began more recently in 2011, as consensus spread that economic indicators alone could not capture a society's progress.

"The problem we faced was determining what those 'other' indicators for our City would be. There's lots of wellbeing measures out there, but we had to find measures that were relevant to us as a local government in inner city Sydney," said the spokesperson.

The City commissioned the Institute for Sustainable Futures to help them. Researchers drew on international evidence and best practice, as well as similar government projects across Australia such as [Community Indicators Victoria](#),



People work out during their lunch break at Observatory Hill  
Photo credit: Katherine Griffiths/City of Sydney

to create the [Community Wellbeing Indicators Framework](#). The Framework consists of 101 measures the City of Sydney can use to track individual and community wellbeing across five areas or 'domains':

- healthy, safe and inclusive communities
- culturally rich and vibrant communities
- democratic and engaged communities
- dynamic, resilient local economies
- sustainable environments.

Following eight weeks of public consultation and feedback in 2012, the City formally adopted the Framework and got to work gathering data about wellbeing. Some of this was drawn from secondary sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Ausgrid and NSW Health. The City also undertook primary research, including via a Wellbeing Survey that was sent to all households in June 2015. The survey had 45 questions, including one that asked participants to rate their own wellbeing.

In October 2016, the City of Sydney released its findings in its first ever [Community Wellbeing](#)

Indicators report. There were some real positives among the results. The proportion of residents who generally trusted other people in the community jumped from 45% to 75% in the eight years to 2015. Almost all residents surveyed in 2015 were willing to help their neighbours, and nearly half did volunteer work. Levels of psychological distress were going down, as were rates of property crime and assaults. And people's rating of their own wellbeing increased a little between 2011-2015.

There were also areas of concern. Domestic violence assaults increased by 22% between 2006 and 2015. There were increases in housing stress and homelessness, and the supply of aged care places was trending downwards in spite of increasing need.

Also, less than half of residents felt a sense of belonging – a really significant finding that has informed a focus on community-strengthening programs and initiatives.

“That is one of the key benefits of using the Community Wellbeing Indicators – it allows us to see areas of concern much more clearly. That in turn means we can prioritise the roll out of services or facilities that will address those concerns,” said the City's spokesperson.

Even in areas that are outside of the City's direct control, such as the abovementioned levels of social housing and aged care, the Wellbeing Indicators are still useful. They increase the City's understanding of what is happening for residents and employees in its local area, meaning staff are better able to educate and advocate for them.

Perhaps most crucially, the Indicators allow the City to track its progress over time.

“The Framework has given us wellbeing targets that we need to hit, based not only on our own goals such as those in Sustainable Sydney 2030, but on the best international evidence. By measuring our progress against those, we can see if we're headed in the right direction, and see



Surry Hills library staff assist customers at the new staff pod; City of Sydney libraries now have new self-service kiosks and helpdesk pods  
Photo credit: City of Sydney

how we compare to other cities in Australia and around the world.”

The City of Sydney will continue to publish the Community Wellbeing Indicators data as it becomes available, and will use the results to inform evidence-based policymaking, service provision and planning decisions.

For example in 2017, as part of its Social Sustainability Policy and forthcoming action plan, the City is developing a range of initiatives to help people get to know their neighbours and develop local social connections. Such initiatives rely on the City understanding people's sense of safety, security and belonging, which are monitored through the Community Wellbeing Indicators and associated Wellbeing Survey.

Although the collection and analysis of the Indicators data is a mammoth task, it has its rewards too. As City of Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore said upon the release of the Community Wellbeing Indicators report in October 2016: “The City works hard to improve the quality of life for our many diverse communities and these results show we are getting there...”

