

# Whole-of-Government Wellbeing Approaches: A Comparative Analysis of Four Central Government Initiatives

## Executive Summary

2022

This executive summary provides an overview of the results of a comparative analysis of four whole-of-government approaches to putting wellbeing at the heart of central government decision-making processes, economic strategies and public policies. This work by the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) is intended to provide an overview of available knowledge and to contribute to further thinking about these wellbeing approaches. It is primarily intended for public health practitioners interested in healthy public policy and whole-of-government approaches to improving the population health and well-being. Readers will be able to explore how these approaches can contribute to public health objectives, particularly those that require upstream action on the determinants of health.

To read the full report, [click here](#).

### Background

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues, governments around the world are incorporating into their discourse and economic recovery plans the need to “build back better” and promote what matters most to individuals and communities - their wellbeing - without compromising the future of the planet or the wellbeing of future generations (All Policies for a Healthy Europe, 2021; British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, 2020; Büchs et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Morrison & Lucyk, 2021).

Reflecting changes in societal and political priorities, more than half of the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) now measure and report on their progress and prosperity by going beyond the use of standard economic indicators, such as gross domestic product (GDP) (OECD, 2020a). Some countries have gone still further

and made wellbeing an explicit priority in their governance practices and public policies. Scotland, Finland, New Zealand and Wales are among them.

This study comes at a time when the Canadian government is signalling its intention to integrate wellbeing considerations more fully into its governance practices, drawing, in particular, on the experiences of Scotland and New Zealand (Sanmartin et al., 2021). In 2021, the Canadian government released a strategy for placing quality of life at the heart of its decision-making processes: *Measuring What Matters: Toward a Quality of Life Strategy for Canada* (Department of Finance Canada, 2021a).

### Comparative analysis of four wellbeing approaches

In order to inform decision making related to wellbeing approaches, the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) has produced a comparative analysis of four wellbeing approaches put forward by central governments, namely those of:

- Scotland, whose National Performance Framework was updated in 2018;
- Finland, who in 2018 implemented the approach set out in the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda);
- New Zealand, whose Wellbeing Budget was adopted in 2019;
- Wales, whose Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act) was adopted in 2015.



Based on a review of the literature, this study has identified similarities and contrasts between these four approaches in relation to the following:

- The wellbeing frameworks used;
- The main objectives pursued;
- Their implementation, evaluation and accountability mechanisms;
- The roles of various actors, including those in public health;
- The difficulties encountered during implementation;
- The pathways to overcoming these difficulties.

The role played by public health actors in the adoption of these approaches was a particular focus of this analytical study. Thus, this document is primarily intended for those involved or interested in the development of healthy public policy at the federal, provincial or territorial level. It could also be of use to actors working collaboratively with municipalities, even though the initiatives described are not spearheaded by local governments.

## Highlights of the four wellbeing approaches studied

The wellbeing approaches studied, with their reference frameworks and associated wellbeing indicators, are policy instruments for the entire government apparatus. Although these approaches have only recently been introduced and have been the subject of few evaluations, they appear promising. They are based on a vision of social, human, economic and environmental progress and rely on measurements that complement those of economic growth and GDP. Their adoption is intended to support what matters most to people, namely their wellbeing.

The main features common to the wellbeing approaches of these central governments are:

- They are intended to be whole-of-government approaches, i.e., they involve the entire government apparatus, as well as other actors (departments, governmental and paragonovernmental agencies, private sector actors, research groups, civil society, etc.).

- They view wellbeing as a multidimensional concept (e.g., with psychological, social, economic, and environmental dimensions) that is closely tied to both the concept of quality of life and the concept of progress, and that aligns with the OECD's Better Life Initiative (2011).
- They rely on a wellbeing framework officially put forward by the government, which also includes a dashboard of wellbeing indicators that complement GDP. These indicators vary from country to country and serve as a guide to measuring the country's progress and success in different areas of wellbeing.

The main objectives pursued by the governments through these wellbeing approaches are to:

- Enhance the performance of the government apparatus by linking decision-making processes to requirements for outcomes that go beyond standard economic measures;
- Be transparent and accountable to the public for actions taken to ensure and promote the wellbeing of all;
- Ensure a better future and greater wellbeing for future generations, nature and the planet as a whole, through prevention, long-term planning and intersectoral action;
- Build on collaboration and the sharing of responsibility among various actors;
- Increase the country's prosperity and stimulate the economy;
- Take action to protect the environment, including from climate change, with a view toward sustainable development and resource sustainability;
- Affirm and promote cultural and national identities;
- Promote justice and equity for the entire population;
- Act in support of international solidarity and cooperation.

In addition to relying on a wellbeing framework, the governments use a variety of means to achieve their objectives. The main mechanisms for implementation, evaluation and accountability are:

- The drafting of various reports that are integrated in different ways into the policy cycles of the central governments;
- The integration of wellbeing indicators into national budgeting processes;
- The creation or use of public bodies whose mandate is to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the wellbeing approach;
- The development of tools, guides, policies, teams, or resources dedicated to building capacity for implementing the wellbeing approach;
- The mobilization of various social groups, the consultation of various experts and citizens, and the setting up of independent commissions;
- Public awareness and communication campaigns.

## Roles of public health actors

Public health actors contribute in a variety of ways to these wellbeing approaches and to the achievement of the country's wellbeing objectives. They play a crucial role in the implementation and monitoring of these wellbeing approaches by providing knowledge, health promotion expertise, epidemiological data and training activities.

## Challenges and potential solutions

This study also points to challenges related to these approaches. These include the need for a change of culture, long-term planning, the adoption of the approach by various actors (e.g., levels of government, sectors, private companies), and consistent application of the wellbeing approach across public policy processes. This document also summarizes some of the ways in which wellbeing objectives can be better integrated within and outside of government. These include strengthening the leadership of senior public servants and other stakeholders, developing and making available wellbeing indicators to guide action, and building the capacity of actors and of partnerships with public health actors, among others.

## Conclusion

It is important to note that the wellbeing approaches studied, although there have been very few studies to evaluate their impact, focus on prevention and long-term planning, while building on the potential of individuals and communities. These same principles are central to health promotion and public health concerns. This document presents concrete examples of the contributions that different actors, including public health actors, can make to such initiatives. However, there is still a need to better understand how these approaches can improve the overall health of individuals, groups and communities, or facilitate certain public health initiatives.

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