



Canadian Wellbeing Policy Initiatives Database *Summary Report*

Tamara Altarac, Megan Butler, Katia Dragan, Julia Macdonald & Meichen Yi

The [Canadian Wellbeing Policy Initiatives Database \(cwkn.ca/scan\)](https://cwkn.ca/scan) was developed as a resource for connecting the vast number of wellbeing policy initiatives being undertaken across Canada. As of April 2023, the database contains 357 entries, covering initiatives across all levels of government and civil society. It is by no means an exhaustive catalogue, nor is it intended to be static. Instead, it represents a broad overview of the discourse and work currently surrounding wellbeing-based policy, and the hope is that it will continue to expand through collaborative input.

This report summarizes insights gathered from the process of developing the database. **Section I** provides an overview of the federal government's engagement with the question of wellbeing-based policy, as of April 2023. **Section II** describes the most common types of wellbeing initiatives undertaken by provincial and municipal governments. **Section III**, in turn, outlines the most common types of community organizations working on wellbeing. Lastly, **Section IV** highlights certain overarching challenges for wellbeing initiatives in Canada.

SECTION I. OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT

In April of 2021, the Canadian federal government published its Quality of Life Framework, joining a growing cohort of governments which have formally embraced a wellbeing-based approach to public policy. The framework, developed through a series of consultations led by the Department of Finance, puts forward six domains of relevance to wellbeing, as well as a suite of associated indicators.

The QOL framework was originally outlined in a report titled “Measuring What Matters”, accompanying the 2021 federal budget, which also allocated resources for improved collection of wellbeing data. The framework has been applied in subsequent federal budgets, as part of the “Statement and Impacts Report on Gender, Diversity and Quality of Life”. Furthermore, in March of 2022, Statistics Canada launched the “Quality of Life Hub”, which features wellbeing resources, data and publications from the federal government.

While Canada has a history of wellbeing measurement and discourse, the Quality of Life Framework represents a significant development in federal direction, in terms of both commitment and investment.

SECTION II. COMMON TYPES OF PROVINCIAL & MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES

INITIATIVE TYPE	ASSOCIATED LANGUAGE	DESCRIPTION
Citizen Satisfaction Survey	satisfaction, life satisfaction, quality of life	Municipal governments often contract research companies to conduct surveys that identify areas of strength and weakness in government programs and service delivery. These surveys generally include 1-3 questions that ask respondents to rate the overall quality of life in their city/town/region.
Official Community Plan	quality of life, wellbeing, social wellbeing, community wellbeing	Municipalities often develop official community plans that consider local wellbeing, reflected in the goals and priorities included. These plans are then used to guide decision-making and investment. Such community plans include Prince Rupert's <i>Official Community Plan</i> (BC166) and Kelowna's <i>Official Community Plan</i> (BC121).
Sustainability Framework	social sustainability, community sustainability, sustainable community	Sustainability initiatives focus on ensuring the wellbeing of future generations. The plans typically provide strategies to ensure sustainable economic, environmental, social, and personal wellbeing. Such frameworks often refer to the <u>UN's Sustainable Development Goals</u> . The city of Langley's <i>Sustainability Framework</i> (BC156) and the City of Iqaluit's <i>Sustainable Community Plan</i> (NU100) are examples of such frameworks.
Indigenous Wellbeing Framework	Social determinants of health, community wellbeing, resiliency, wellness	Indigenous frameworks focus on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit worldviews and conceptions of wellbeing. Examples include the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health's <i>Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: The role of Indigenous knowledge in supporting wellness in Inuit communities in Nunavut</i> report (NUN101), and the Anishinaabek notion of <i>Mino-Bimaadiziwin</i> (ON106).
Youth Oriented Initiative	child wellbeing, youth wellbeing, student wellbeing	There are a number of initiatives targeting child and youth wellbeing. Generally, these involve a set of indicators measuring facets of wellbeing relevant to formative years, including social, emotional, physical, economic, and civic domains. Examples include Toronto's <i>Child Friendly TO</i> (ON103) and Nova Scotia's <i>Child WellBeing Report</i> (NS200).
Senior Wellbeing Initiative	quality of life, age friendly, healthy aging	There are a number of initiatives designed to respond to the wellbeing needs of citizens at specific stages of their life course, notably in their senior years. Common metrics include quality of life measurements and healthy aging indicators. Examples include Ontario's <i>Finding the Right Fit: Age-Friendly Community Planning</i> (ON202) and New Glasgow's and County of Pictou's <i>Age Friendly Action Plan</i> (NS107).

SECTION III. COMMON TYPES OF COMMUNITY WELLBEING ORGANIZATIONS

ORGANIZATION TYPE	ASSOCIATED LANGUAGE	DESCRIPTION
Wellbeing Oriented Non-Profit Organization	community wellbeing, quality of life, child and youth wellbeing, student wellbeing, senior wellbeing, life satisfaction	Non-profit organizations across Canada have been established to promote wellbeing. Common types of projects include wellbeing research and analysis, and development of enrichment projects. Many nonprofits serve specific subgroups, such as children and youth, whereas others do general wellbeing work. Examples include Engage Nova Scotia and Wellbeing BC.
Community Foundation Funding	community wellbeing, quality of life, community vitality	Community foundations seek to guide volunteerism and financial support to where they will have the greatest impact. Many have established grants for wellbeing initiatives. Most frequently, these funds are allocated according to strategic priorities identified in Vital Signs reports. For example, the Victoria Foundation (ORG22) has a Vital Stream fund, where applicants are asked to identify the vital sign indicator on which their project will focus. British Columbia's First Nations Public Service Secretariat's (ORG28) "First Nations WellBeing Fund" is another example of such an initiative.
Community Wellbeing Collaborative	community wellbeing, quality of life, holistic wellbeing	Community collaboratives bring local stakeholders together to form partnerships, establish priorities and integrate projects. These collaboratives are distinct from NGOs in that they do not create independent wellbeing programmes, but bring together organizations to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and help integrate interpretations of wellbeing into a broader community vision. Such collectives include Wellbeing Waterloo Region (ORG04) and Community Oxford (ORG16).
Social Planning Council Wellbeing Research	social wellbeing, quality of life, community wellbeing, community vitality	Numerous social planning councils have adopted wellbeing measures into their research on community development and progress. Some councils, such as the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (ORG26), have employed established measurement systems like the CIW, whereas others, such as the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ORG09), have relied on the social determinants of health literature to develop their own indicators. Generally, this research is used to monitor community progress from a wellbeing perspective and to inform policy.

SECTION IV. OVERARCHING CHALLENGES

1. Inconsistent Use of Language

The scan revealed an important diversity of language and conceptual understandings surrounding wellbeing. Furthermore, it was noted that there was often a lack of rigor and consistency in defining wellbeing related terms, and that such terms were often used to promote initiatives without substantial meaning or action attached to them.

2. Lack of accountability

It was noted that many initiatives seemed to lack follow-up reporting, making it difficult for constituents, and other interested parties, to assess the status and progress of the programs. However, other municipalities, such as the city of Surrey, provide updates to residents every few years.

3. Issues with citizen satisfaction surveys

Citizen satisfaction surveys were common across municipal governments in most provinces and territories. However, the surveys would generally only ask one or two questions pertaining to quality of life. Furthermore, there were issues with the wording of quality of life questions, which often lacked proper definitions of terms and asked about quality of life within a specific context, such as life within a city.

The database can be found at <https://cwkn.ca/scan> . To contribute to the database, please contact info@cwkn.ca