

UNITING BY CAUSE TO IMPACT AT SCALE:

A shared outcomes measurement blueprint for Australia

Context

Australia spends over \$420bn a year across health, social services, education and a wide variety of other social issue domains. The total cost accounts for around 30% of GDP and has grown over four or five decades as the country's income and wealth increased.

However, the crunch has come. In recent years there has been a growing recognition that we cannot continue to increase expenditure on social issues as we have in the past. Slowing economic growth and an ageing population will place unprecedented pressures on our social purpose systems in years to come.

Leaders across governments, the social sector, academia and the community are grappling with these challenges through reforms in funding models, creation of actuarial-based market models, experiments with social investment, collaborative and place-based approaches and many others.

If we look broadly across our social purpose system there is increasing recognition of two key underlying issues:

- siloed and fragmented approaches are failing to effectively deal with complex, integrated social issues, and;
- a lack of clear, consistent measurement of our progress in improving outcomes.

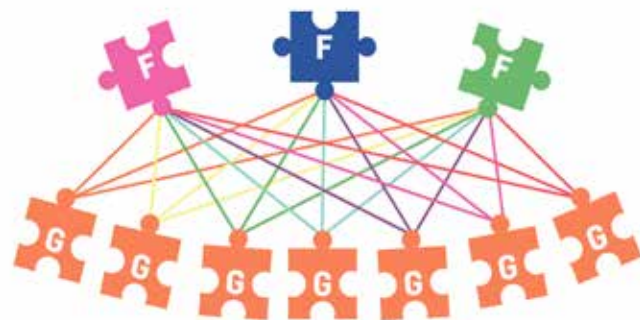
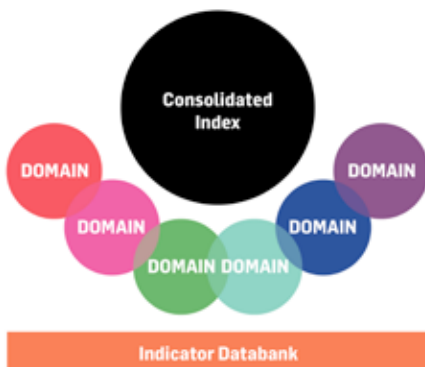
So, what might change if we collectively agreed on key outcomes, a set of indicators to measure them, and a system to collect and summarise the information on how we're tracking, what's changing and where? What if individual organisations had access to their own data and could compare that across the whole sector? What might we achieve if we had insight into the greater cause and whether and where we are most making a difference? What if we united by cause, to create social impact at scale?

Vision

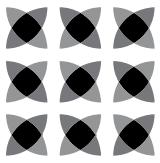
At CSI, we have a vision for a comprehensive national outcomes measurement system that can track how Australia is progressing socially.

In summary, our vision is for a shared system in which:

- governments, social purpose organisations, academics and communities contribute to and access the best available data and indicators;
- key indicators are grouped in linked social issue Domains (for example, early childhood, employment, disability, housing and homelessness) and data pre-populated so that social progress can be monitored over time at a national, state or local level;
- the emphasis is on improving outcomes for people, families and communities first, with application for evaluation of programs and attribution of outcomes to interventions second.



(The Status Quo: Kramer, Parkhurst & Valdyanathan, 2009)



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Where are we now?

In Australia, social purpose organisations (governments, NFPs, philanthropic organisations, corporates and social enterprises) endeavouring to measure outcomes face a difficult task. There are many different approaches, methods and indicators.

Commonly, organisations individually report outcomes to funders based on an individual program or at an organisational level. This means that we lack an ability to integrate outcomes measurement to understand if and where sectors and organisations are making a difference to shifting complex social problems.

For example, there are no shared outcome indicators that housing affordability and homelessness services across sectors (e.g. government, not-for-profit, social enterprise) can currently use to determine if and how they are making a difference to whether people have access to safe, affordable, stable and secure housing.

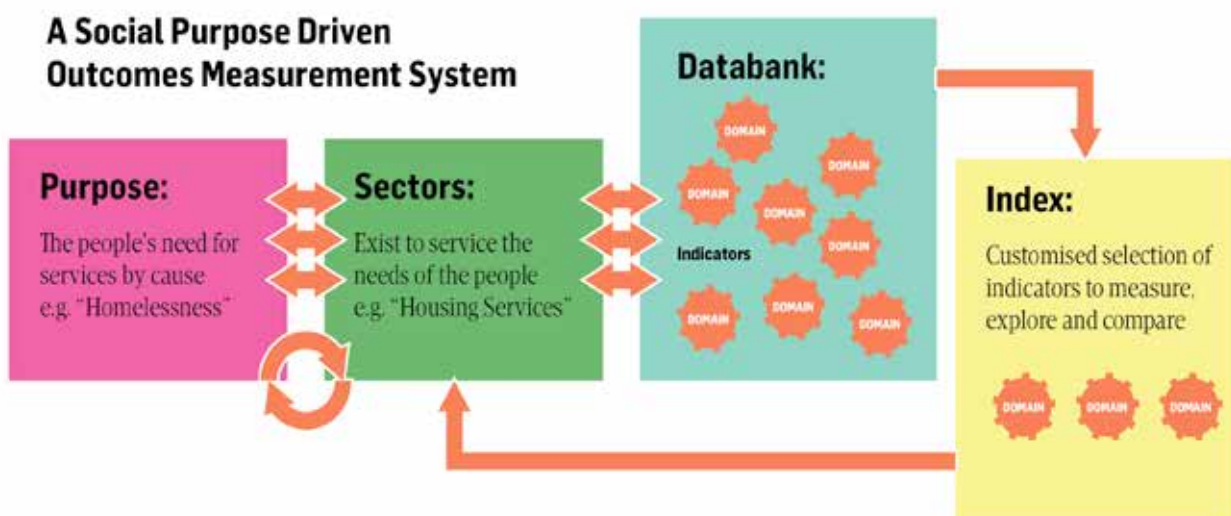
At CSI, we believe that if we are serious about improving outcomes for people experiencing complex 'wicked' problems, we need a different measurement approach. We need to think bigger.

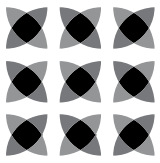
Where do we want to be?

We already know that social problems are inherently complex. They are not confined to single organisations, policy areas, sectors or regions and addressing these problems requires multiple and varying people, roles and groups. It is also difficult to attribute change to just one organisation, policy or program.

We believe that if we are going to measure change, we need a shift in thinking. We need to focus first on the social outcomes we want to achieve and then on the contributions individual projects, organisations, initiatives and policies are making towards these changes. We want to know:

- Are our kids, young people, aged, families any better off (happier, healthier, resilient, connected and included) in society?
- Are our services, enterprises, innovations, policies, programs, organisations changing lives, communities and society?
- How have social outcomes changed overtime by sector, geographic areas, social context etc?





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How will we do this?

1. Social progress domains: The measurement framework will consist of linked social issue Domains (overseen by a group of experts and stakeholders in the relevant field). Each Domain will feature the most important/relevant high quality indicators for the outcomes each social issue field wishes to achieve. The Domains will be “layered” with different levels of detail to enable less or more comprehensive indicators and data.
2. An indicator databank: The Domains will draw from a common databank of indicators and data will be linked to a wide range of data sources (for example ABS, AHIW, OECD and others) to enable benchmarking.
3. A shared measurement platform: A shared measurement platform² will be developed to enable the linking and organising of large datasets and facilitate engaging interaction with the data.
4. Principles: A framework of principles will underpin the system and support shared measurement, for example:
 - Purpose driven
 - Inclusive
 - Accessible and transparent (de-identified at a unit or organisational record level)
 - Co-designed with stakeholders
 - Rigorous
 - Ethical
 - Open source/Open access/able to work with or link with existing technology

Who will use it?

• Community User:

Any member of the community will be able to explore the domains and data in the system. At the simplest level this might be viewing the performance measures at the overall and domain level using the pre-determined indicator sets. The user will be able to interact with the data through a set of filters (eg looking at a national, state or postcode level) and with different graphical representation (for example, using software like Tableau) including time-series, geographic mapping and other.

• Custom User:

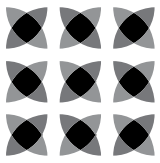
A more sophisticated user – for example, a community undertaking a “place-based” approach to a social issue; a government agency; a large not-for-profit – might choose to create their own set of key indicators either by starting with existing Domains and adding/removing individual data elements from the Databank or by creating their own group of measures.

• Shared Measurement Collaborator/ Benchmarker:

The platform may be developed so that users’ data can be uploaded, and compared with/ analysed with other data in the Databank. This might be used by a community undertaking a collective impact approach or any other group of collaborating organisations. It may also be used to benchmark progress against other (like) areas. In this scenario the uploaded data would be available to the collaborators/ benchmarkers but not to other system users.

• Data Linker:

Subject to quality controls and principles, some data may be uploaded using the platform as described in (3), but the data is deemed suitable for addition to the Databank for access by other users; for example, data collected by a State government agency, or data collected in a well-resourced collective impact collaboration.



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What next?

This is a long term plan. We are currently exploring indicators across a large number of social domains as part of Australia's Social Pulse³ and are in the prototyping stage for the shared measurement platform.

We are currently looking to work with two domain areas (housing/ homelessness and early childhood) for identifying the most important outcome areas and indicators to include in the system. In the longer term, realising this vision will require resources and experts from different organisations and sectors willing to engage in co-design, testing and helping to drive change.

We envisage our shared outcomes measurement system will be the first of its kind in Australia, and will help us to truly create beneficial social impact at scale.

1: **Citation:** Muir, K., Bennett, S., Reeve, R., Powell, A. and Young, A. (2015), Uniting By Cause to Impact At Scale: A Shared Outcomes Measurement Blueprint for Australia, Sydney: Centre for Social Impact.

2: Shared measurement is commonly understood as a shared approach to what is measured and how it is measured and with a common tool used for data collection and reporting. See for example Kramer, M., Parkhurst, M. & Vaidyanathan, L. (2009). Breakthroughs in shared measurement and social impact. FSG Social Impact Advisors.; Ogain, E., Svistak, M. & Casas, L. (2013). Blueprint for shared measurement. NPC for Inspiring Impact.

3. See <http://www.csi.edu.au/research/project/australias-social-pulse/>; and <http://www.policypulseforum.com.au/host-organisations/>.