

EvidenceMatters

Every young South Australian Counts!



Policy Brief

No data. No problem?

The message is clear:

Every young South Australian counts!

Early investment and targeted intervention have benefits at every stage of development that compound throughout each child or young person's lifetime. These benefits are individual and systemic.

Due to data gaps, monitoring and reporting how children and young people are faring is a challenge.

South Australia is leading the way with a legislated Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People. This framework was developed in consultation with multiple stakeholders across South Australia in 2018-19. Children and young people contributed their views about what makes a good life via an online survey, focus groups, forums, postcards and a summit. Parents, families, carers and other key stakeholders, including Aboriginal people and state and local government, provided input.

The framework is structured at four levels (dimensions, outcomes, indicators and measures). There are five overarching interrelated dimensions enshrined in legislation - health, safety, wellbeing, education and citizenship. Under these dimensions are the following

measurable outcomes; that young South Australians:

- are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy
- are safe and nurtured
- are happy, inspired and engaged
- are successful learners
- participate actively in society.

Under each of these outcomes are a series of 18 indicators which define the optimal state or direction of change needed to achieve the outcomes. The indicators are supported by 67 measures which provide evidence of progress.

The Child Development Council is legislated to report under the framework to help guide the South Australian Government's policy,



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legislation, funding and services. The data provided aim to inform a whole-of-government approach to supporting children and young people.

Wherever possible, national and international comparisons are provided. The resultant data provide objective and standardised evidence of progress and show where action

is needed to improve outcomes.

This policy brief aims to highlight to government the availability of data to enable the Council to report against the outcomes. Although each indicator was evaluated for inclusion in the framework against a range of criteria, including data availability, there have been some gaps that are important to emphasize.

It is well recognised that investing in early childhood development is essential to helping children, communities and societies thrive and as such, it is too costly for South Australia not to know how children are faring across all the outcomes as legislated. In line with the title of this policy brief, in the absence of data we have no evidence to inform policy and practice.

Data gaps matter

Why do data gaps matter?

Good quality data are fundamental to government and policy makers for creating strategies, setting objectives or developing and implementing policies affecting children and young people. Data gaps inhibit South Australia's decision makers to make informed decisions.

Reporting under the framework relies mainly on publicly available summarised data. This dependency on public data restricts the sort of information and the timeliness of available data, eg for annual reporting purposes. Further, reliance on open data sources leads to questions of the data being fit for purpose. To what extent do the data appropriately meet the intent of the framework indicators?

Public data are usually available at the whole-of-population level, however disaggregated data in some circumstances have been

difficult to obtain including data disaggregated by state and territory, data for children and young people with disability and data for Aboriginal children and young people.

Data for Aboriginal children and young people may be suppressed due to a range of constraints including smaller sample sizes. Data for Aboriginal children and young people are also subject to Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles with prerequisites that may be limiting governments' comfort in sharing data publicly.

Determining data gaps

More than sixty measures have been identified for reporting under the indicators of South Australia's inaugural framework. In evaluating the severity of data gaps for these measures, the Council has identified two broad categories to assess the existing data gaps:

Data applicability How relevant/well matched are the data to the measures?

Data quality Data frequency – how often are the data collected and/or reported?

Trend data – are trend data available?

Data consistency – are data captured or derived differently across the years?

Geographical comparability – are data available for comparison across the states and territories as well as by geographical region and socioeconomic status?

Disaggregation by priority equity group at the state level – the degree of data coverage to the reported measures, ie whether data can be broken by the following determinants: age, gender, Aboriginality and disability.

Severity of data gaps for the framework outcomes are classified as follows:

- Low** The available data source is generally able to provide disaggregation.
- Medium** While whole-of-population data are available, insufficient data are reported for certain priority equity groups and/or data are not recent.
- High** No appropriate data are available for reporting.

Figure 1 below shows the severity of data gaps for the 2019-2022 framework dimensions.

Seven of the 10 measures for the Education dimension are classified as having *low* data gap severity. This is because the data available from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data portal are comprehensive and current. On the other hand, 83% of the measures for the Citizenship dimension are subject to a '*medium-to-high*' data gap severity.

Access the findings of the assessment in the [data gaps tables](#).

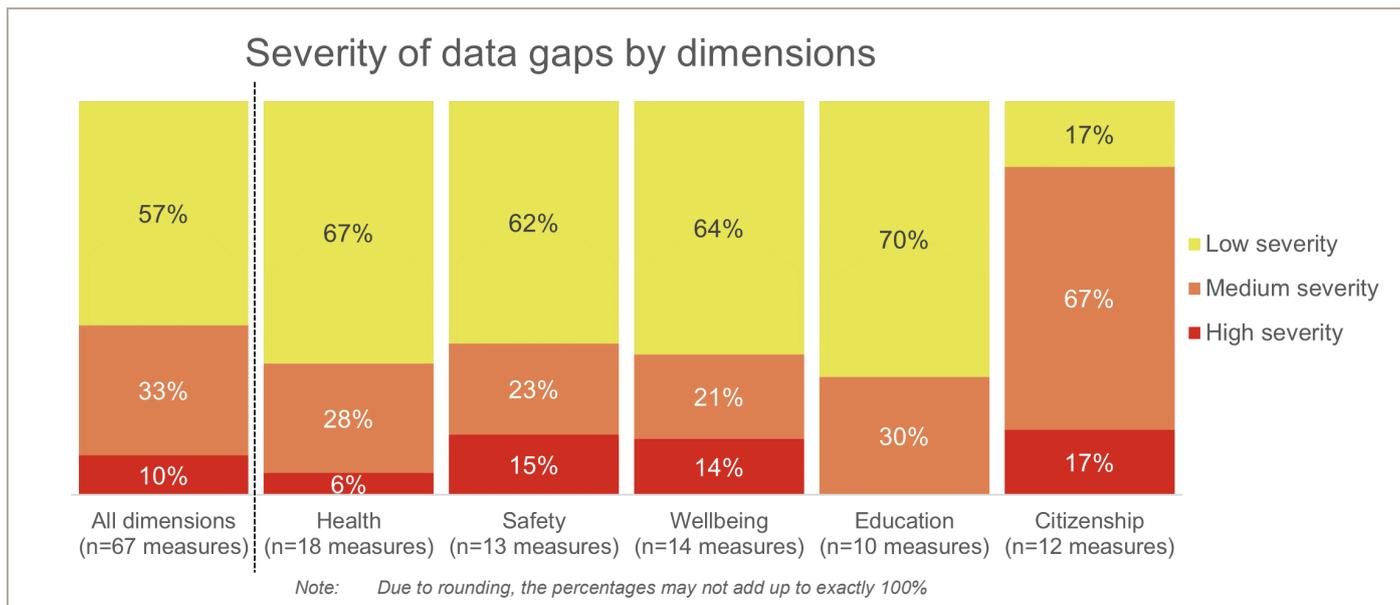


Figure 1: Proportion of data gap severity by dimension(s) in South Australia's Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People.

Wellbeing - a special focus

The Wellbeing dimension facilitates reporting of how happy, inspired and engaged young South Australians are in their homes, schools and communities. This dimension tracks the outcomes of children and young people with the following indicators under the framework:

- Children have early experiences that enhance their development
- Children and young people are connected to family, friends and culture
- Children and young people play and participate in recreational activities

- Children and young people are leading satisfied lives.

The data sources used for reporting in the Wellbeing dimension are the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Preschool Education Collection, South Australia Department for Education Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC), ABS Cultural Participation Survey, Productivity Commission Report on Government Services (ROGS) and the ABS Causes of Death, Australia publications.

The severity of data gaps for the

Wellbeing dimension is skewed towards the *low* level because most measures for these indicators come from regularly updated data sources that also disaggregate by priority equity group. For example, the WEC which facilitates self-reporting by students in Years 4 to 12, collects and publishes data for students reporting that *they feel connected to adults in school*. However, the WEC no longer collects information about children *feeling connected to adults at home and in the community*. These measures were considered important through the original

community consultations when developing the framework, so this lack of data is considered a *high* severity data gap.

Medium severity data gaps exist for three measures. The first two measures relate to children and young people's participation and

attendance in cultural activities, because the ABS cultural participation survey does not publish separate data for Aboriginal children and young people. The 2017-18 survey also featured a different targeted reporting age to the 2013-14

survey limiting our ability to show change for the indicator over time. The third is for the rate of suicide among children and young people as a result of data suppression. The inability to monitor trends due to data suppression, by default, equates to a data gap.

Improving outcomes - what we're doing

Identifying the data gaps

View the [data gaps tables](#) and [dashboard](#) which show the severity of data gaps for the 67 framework measures.

1. Since the framework commenced in November 2019, yearly report cards have shown how young South Australians under 18 years are faring in terms of their health, safety, wellbeing, education and preparedness for adulthood
2. Raising awareness of the data gaps with South Australia's decision makers and data custodians and seeking their cooperation to fill these gaps
3. Engaging eminent researchers and data custodians regarding the Data Sovereignty Principles to clarify and guide data availability and reporting for Aboriginal children and young people.

Improving outcomes - what you can do

State and local government **Chief Executives and leadership teams** should lead their organisations and staff in:

1. **Endorsing** the framework in high-level planning and strategy processes and documentation, thereby publicly committing to improving agreed outcomes for children and young people. It is important that all governments work towards this shared set of outcomes as legislated.
2. **Applying** the [framework](#) and proactively:
 - **determining** how the organisation's policies, programs and services align with the 5 dimensions and outcome statements?
 - **embedding** the dimensions and outcome statements in the organisation's policies, programs and services ie, into all existing aspects and mechanisms to give effect to the framework
 - **considering** the indicators and the outcomes statements and asking: Are we collecting or reporting data that provide evidence of how children and young people are doing?

Access the data

1. Data gaps tables, last updated 30 August 2022, <https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Data-gaps-table-2022-08-30.pdf>
2. Determining the data gaps dashboard, https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/dashboards_data_gaps/