

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

There are many definitions of wellbeing. The *Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)* has adopted the following as its working definition:

The presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing adopted this definition after extensive consultations with national leaders and organizations, community groups, research experts, indicator users, and importantly, the Canadian public. In those discussions, they clearly expressed what really matters to their wellbeing. They also re-affirmed the core values they believe are essential for a thriving and welcoming society – fairness, diversity, equity, inclusion, health, safety, economic security, democracy, and sustainability.

DOMAINS OF WELLBEING IDENTIFIED BY CANADIANS

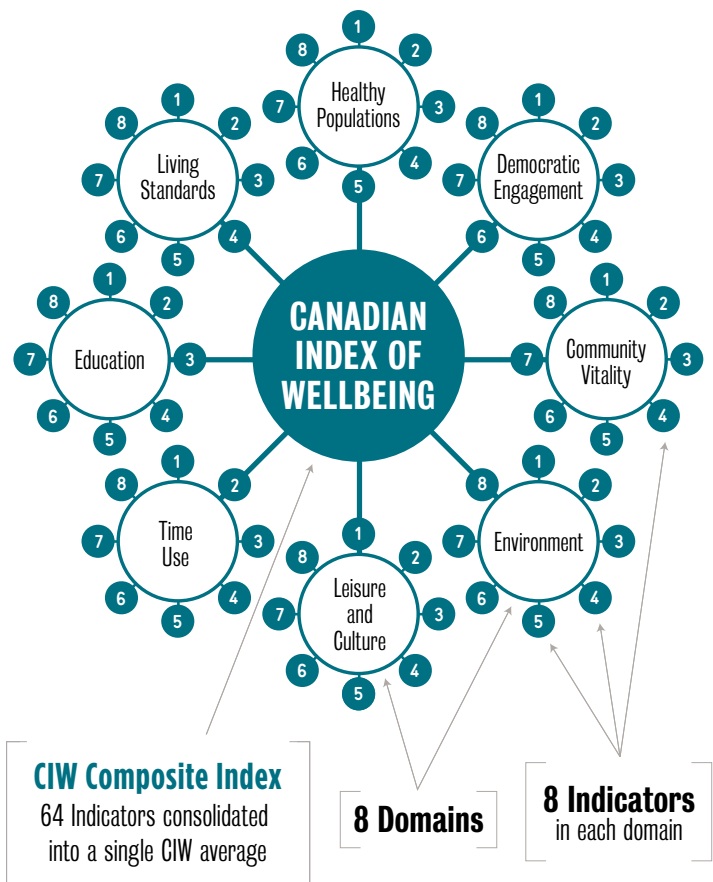
Since its inception and throughout its development, the CIW has been designed to ensure everyday Canadians hear their own voices and see themselves reflected in it. The consultation process culminated in the eight domains of life that contribute to and affect the wellbeing of Canadians: *Community Vitality, Democratic Engagement, Education, Environment, Healthy Populations, Leisure and Culture, Living Standards, and Time Use* (see Figure 1). This framework shifts the focus solely from the economy to other factors that affect the quality of life of Canadians.

Together, these eight domains provide a more complete picture of wellbeing, incorporating a comprehensive set of the key social, health, economic, and environmental factors contributing to overall quality of life. Teams of nationally and internationally renowned experts then identified eight valid, reliable, and relevant indicators within each domain that are directly related to wellbeing. By integrating the 64 indicators and eight domains and revealing their complex interconnections, the CIW composite index provides a comprehensive portrait of quality of life in Canada.

The CIW composite index tracks all indicators and domains of wellbeing to measure our progress over time, highlighting how we are doing – where we are doing well and where we could be doing better.

The CIW is not a static measure. As new issues emerge and new knowledge, understandings, and data become available, the CIW adapts to strengthen its measure of wellbeing without veering from the values on which it is grounded. Validating and continually improving the CIW is an ongoing process. It ensures that the Index is rooted in Canadian values, grounded in community experience, shaped by technical expertise, and responsive to emerging knowledge. It is a conversation starter about the things that really matter to individuals and communities as we strive to improve our collective quality of life.

FIGURE 1. THE CANADIAN INDEX OF WELLBEING FRAMEWORK



The CIW’s call to action is to encourage all sectors to be guided by solid evidence, and to empower Canadians to advocate for change that reflects their needs and values. By putting wellbeing at the heart of policy development, funding decisions, program development, and service delivery, we respond to our desire to know, “How can we do better?”