



Choosing Indicators that Matter

Description:

This tool provides an explanation of how to choose indicators and offers examples of indicators.

How it can be used:

An indicator is a measure that is supported by data, which helps determine whether you have achieved the desired results. For each area of wellness, you can ask *“How will we know we’ve been successful in this area?”* to determine measurable indicators of progress. Use this tool to help guide the discussion about indicators and help you choose relevant indicators in your organization and community.

“Indicators arise from values (we measure what we care about) and they create values (we care about what we measure).”¹

What is an indicator?

An indicator is a measure that is supported by data, and that helps determine whether we have achieved the desired results of our initiatives, programs, and services.

What’s the difference between a target and an indicator?

A target is a specific goal we aim to achieve, while an indicator is a measurement of where we are right now (in relation to that target):

- **Target** – 100% of all babies are immunized according to the provincial schedules by 20XX
- **Indicator** – % of babies following immunization schedules (currently 60%, for example)

Benefits of Having and Tracking Indicators

Identifying indicators can be very helpful for your community for the following reasons:

- Helps measure the progress toward the targets you are aiming to achieve;
- Makes decisions less political and more results-based;
- Gives the ability to review where you are and see where improvements can be made;
- Provides an opportunity to think about new ways to address current challenges;
- Using indicators when developing programs is more likely to lead to success.

¹ Quote from *Measuring Wellness: An Indicator Guide for First Nations* 2015





How to develop indicators

It is important to develop indicators that are relevant to your community. By working with community members to develop indicators of wellness that reflect the uniqueness of your community, you will give people the tools and information they need to see if progress is being made in areas that are important to them.

Take care in deciding what to measure. Your community will start noticing the data that you track and caring whether or not numbers are going up or down. Selecting indicators that are linked strongly to your community's values, is a sure way to be certain that you are measuring what people care about.

Another element is to look for indicators that tell you something about multiple aspects of wellness. This not only creates efficiency in monitoring, but also reflects the notion that multiple areas of wellness are interconnected. For example, “# of youth learning traditional language from Elders” speaks to education levels, intergenerational connectedness, and language revitalization.

Ensure the indicators you choose are culturally relevant and strengths-based. Reframe the negative focus into something positive; because that's really what you're seeking! For example, instead of measuring the number of students dropping out of school, focus on increasing the number of students that graduate.

In order for indicators to most effective, assess them using these criteria:

- **Valid:** measure what they are trying to measure;
- **Reliable:** easy to repeat measurements and get same results;
- **Specific:** measure only what they are meant to measure;
- **Measurable:** based on available and easy to obtain data;
- **Relevant:** provide clear information for key policy issues;
- **Cost-effective/feasible:** benefits of having data must outweigh costs of collecting information;
- **Comparable:** can be compared to other provincial or national level statistics (not always important).





Some examples of indicators²:

Ancestry/Culture/Tradition

- Number of drums in community
- Numbers of drumming occasions per year
- Percentage that speak (and/or understand) traditional language
- Appropriate care for and using the knowledge and wisdom of Elders
- Number of community members with traditional name
- Types of games, gatherings, and ceremonies organized
- Availability and use of traditional healers and medicines
- Percentage of adults consuming traditional foods (and medicines) – game, fish, berries, etc.
- Number of community or group celebrations

Health/Wellbeing

- Number and types of activities promoting healthy eating habits
- Percentage receiving pre-natal screenings
- Number of smoke-free homes
- Level of access to health professionals – physician, nurse, dentist, clinics, etc.
- Percentage of children and adults participating in physical activity every day
- Homes are safe and secure (e.g., % of homes with working smoke alarms)
- Percentage of people using seatbelts and child car seats

Education

- Percentage of children and youth that attend and participate fully in school
- Number of early learning opportunities for children
- Percentage of children attending early learning opportunities
- Percentage of children achieving learning expectations
- Highest level of schooling attained by members (age 15+)
- Community efforts to encourage learning and formal education

Social

- Number of community or group celebrations
- Access to communications and information technology (telephone service, computers in home, internet access, etc.)
- Community website updated regularly

² Examples adapted from *Measuring Wellness: An Indicator Guide for First Nations* 2015

