

Measuring Quality of Life in Residential Care



What is the SA Innovation Hub?

The South Australia Innovation Hub (the Hub) is a group of aged care providers that have formed a community of practice. All have a shared passion for working with older people to improve and support quality of life and consider innovative ways in which this can be enhanced. Over the past three years, Hub members have been working on developing an approach to building quality of life in residential aged and home care. A working party participated in a research project conducted by Dr Adrian Tomyne and Dr Melissa Weinberg from the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University. The result has been the development of a Quality of Life (QoL) Framework that allows us to actively promote quality of life (not just measure it) and go beyond providing quality of care.

What is QoL and wellbeing?

The South Australian Aged Care Wellbeing and Satisfaction Survey identifies that QoL is a broad term comprising both objective and subjective elements. Objective elements might include age, health status, level of income etc., but is the ability to measure and understand subjective wellbeing (SWB) elements that can offer *“important insights into how people feel and think about themselves and their lives, independent of their objective life circumstances”*.

Subjective wellbeing or ‘happiness’ is a combination of affective and cognitive components i.e. both emotion/ mood and thoughts which may be in response to a pleasant stimulus (e.g. meeting with friends) or a more enduring positive mood (e.g. general satisfaction or contentment). Short term happiness is referred to as a ‘state’ of happiness whilst the longer term ‘trait’ happiness is the type of happiness measured by the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) Tool in the Survey. In much the same way as a person’s temperature is automatically maintained at a set temperature, trait happiness is also thought to have a set-point that is sustained through a homeostatic process.

The Australian Centre on Quality of Life identified eight broad domains that are important to QoL and then asked people to give a rating on how satisfied they are based on their own criteria about what’s important within that domain e.g. Health. This approach works well at a population level with approx. 15,000 Australians surveyed over more than a decade. The tool has been statistically validated and provides a reliable indication of QoL.

Why be concerned about Quality of Life in residential care?

Evidence suggests that the average subjective wellbeing is 80 points (on a 100 point scale), although individual variations normally range between 70-90 points. While a lower set-point does not automatically mean an individual is depressed, it does suggest they may have a higher risk for depression and possibly less resilience in responding to life circumstances. Understanding which individuals are at risk of depression or are dissatisfied with their life can be of enormous assistance to a provider when seeking to deliver services that improve quality of life.

In 2016, the South Australian Innovation Hub partnered with researchers at the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University. The primary aim of the commissioned research project was to explore levels of subjective wellbeing (SWB) in a sample of older people living in a number of aged care settings across South Australia.

This is the first research project to measure subjective wellbeing and aged care satisfaction in aged care residents using a robust and standardized measurement approach. This research is also unique in that it considered important measurement considerations relating to older Australians in its design and implementation.

This research represents an important undertaking by the South Australian Innovation Hub – Quality of Life Group, to support and adopt a scientifically rigorous approach to the measurement of wellbeing in aged care.

Two survey instruments were used to measure quality of life through subjective wellbeing and care domains using the PWI and Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) respectively.

What were the results?

Results of the residential survey found that the (187) participants, aged between 60 and 101 years recorded slightly above normal range for mainstream older adults as shown in Figure 7 below.

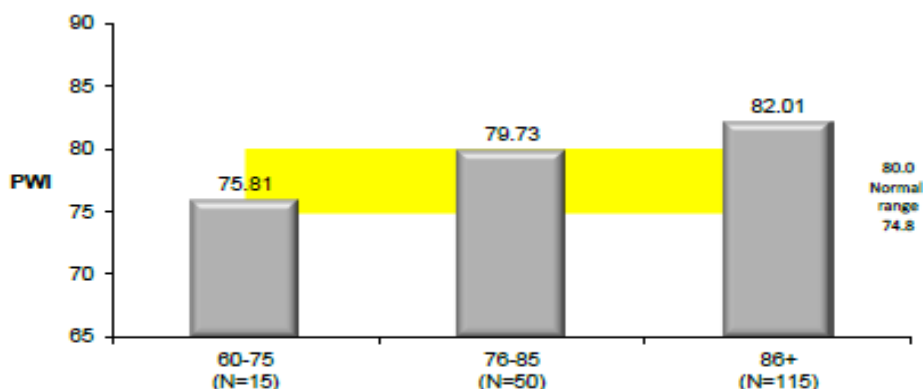


Figure 7: Age and SWB

Participants aged 86+ have the highest levels of overall subjective wellbeing, while those aged 60-75 have the lowest levels and the highest proportion of scores 70 points or less. To better understand these results the profiles were considered across the seven PWI domains and summarised in Figure 8 below.

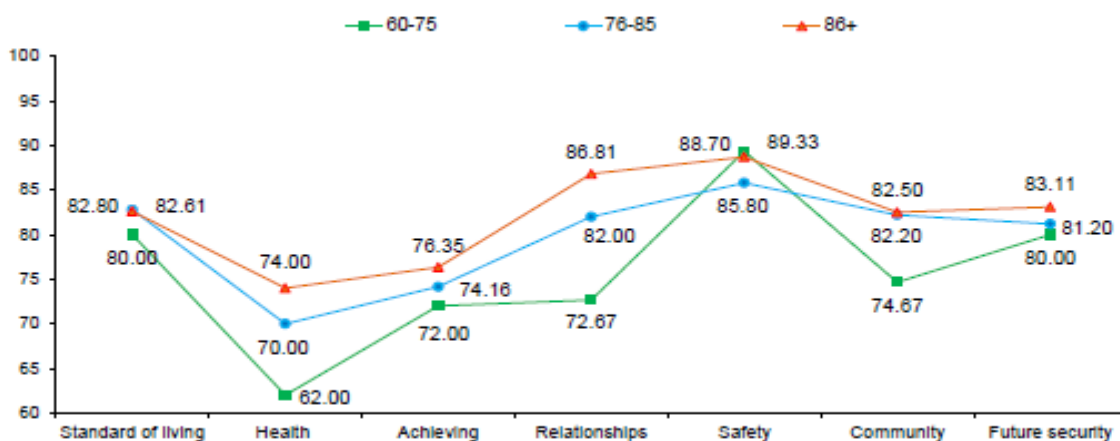


Figure 8: Age and PWI domain profiles

People in the 86+ group reported the highest level of satisfaction across most domains, while people in the 60-75 group generally reported lower levels of satisfaction. The latter group also reported very low level satisfaction with 'health', with a mean of 62 points, but comparatively higher on the domain of 'safety'. These scores suggest that many of the individuals in this cohort may have made a recent decision to move to residential care based on health related illnesses and issues.

Their wellbeing answers suggest that participants have a good sense of personal wellbeing, are generally satisfied with life and that their personal wellbeing is comparable to mainstream older Australian adults.

SA Innovation Hub Project Lead, Thuy Phan noted that the average aged care satisfaction is high and positive across all aged care settings sampled, suggesting that most participants across all settings are generally satisfied with their aged care experience. This is positive feedback for Service Providers who do their best to make sure that individual needs are understood and planned for. To be able to identify people at higher risk of depression enables proactive strategies to be put in place to build resilience.

Participants reported the highest average satisfaction scores on 'Appearance' ('keeping clean and presentable in appearance') and 'Treatment' ('how you are treated'), with both means above 90 points.

What next?

This partnership between the South Australia Innovation Hub and the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University represents the first project to measure subjective wellbeing and aged care satisfaction in an aged care resident population using a robust and standardised measurement approach.

At a local service provider level, it delivers information about residents' levels of wellbeing and provides an opportunity to build resilience in at-risk individuals who score less than 60 points. It also potentially offers opportunity for how, at a local level, consideration may be given to improving aspects of quality of life.

At a macro level, future research projects that seek to measure and monitor aged care satisfaction on a larger national scale could reveal more important resident differences, and also consider such in home care services environment, which would have major implications for government policy and service delivery,

An additional benefit for the Hub members is that we have additional insight and experience in the use of the metrics and related tools used in this project in assessing quality of life and sharing such outcomes. This is linked to the directions being explored in the Government aged care reforms and the use of quality indicators.

Resthaven is an inaugural member of the South Australian Innovation Hub.

Further information on the South Australia Innovation Hub can be accessed at:

<http://sainnovationhub.org/>

The South Australian Aged Care Wellbeing and Satisfaction Survey report is available here:

https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-18581602/documents/59c9a9b371d26Y5zmS6P/Aged%20care%20wellbeing%20and%20satisfaction%20report_Part%20A_The%20Report_Revised.pdf