CENTRE FOR
AGEING
BETTER

Measuring ageing:
An introduction to the Ageing Better
Measures Framework

Centre for Ageing Better

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About the Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from The National Lottery Community Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence.

Acknowledgements

Background

Measurement is an essential tool for anyone interested in achieving social change. It can be used to explore and understand an issue, to monitor change over time or between populations, to directly or indirectly evaluate the effect of an intervention or policy, or to determine the performance of a particular service.

However, measurement is difficult. Each of these different purposes requires different sorts of measures and data collections. And in an area as broad as ageing, interventions in one area (housing, say) may well have outcomes in others (health, wellbeing and financial security).

The Centre for Ageing Better therefore decided to develop the Ageing Better Measures Framework (ABMF) to help individuals and organisations working in this area to access and utilise some of the most high-quality measures, scales and data sources looking at outcomes at the individual level. It is intended as an accessible tool for anyone who is interested in ageing-related data or evaluation of ageing-related activities.

About the Ageing Better Measures Framework

The ABMF is a non-exhaustive compendium of 63 measures, survey scales and their associated data sources looking at outcomes at the individual level related to ageing and later life. It is split into 12 broad topics:

Finance	Health and wellbeing	Social connections
Major life transitions	Plans for the future	Recreation and leisure
Fulfilling work	Community contributions	Relationships
Physical and mental health activity	Home and neighbourhood	Care and support services

How the framework can be used

The ABMF is a versatile tool that is useful for a variety of audiences from the private, public and voluntary sectors. You might find it useful if you are:

- A service provider measuring specific outcomes of services and activities;

- An individual or organisation working in an area to co-ordinate efforts around ageing locally looking to measure progress against objectives (for example in age-friendly communities);

- A funder aiming to ensure that funding is informed by monitoring and evaluation, therefore providing the greatest impact and value for money;

- A researcher or evaluator interested in gathering data on individual outcomes related to ageing in your projects;

- Anyone interested in the broad topic of later life who is aiming to better understand the context of ageing in the UK.

Measures such as those in the ABMF can potentially be used for these and other purposes, although not all the measures in the ABMF will be suitable for all purposes.

The ABMF is presented in Microsoft Excel and is split into four 'core' tabs (At a glance; Topics; Index – measures & scales; Index – surveys & data sources) and 63 'measures, scales and surveys' tabs. Each of the 63 tabs contains a general description of the item, often including some further information where possible such as how the measurement is conducted, information on reliability and validity, and links to further sources of technical and policy information about the measure.

How the ABMF was developed

The ABMF was developed iteratively over the course of 2017/2018. A wide but non-exhaustive range of sources were used to identify and select measures, including:

- Consultation with subject specialists within the Centre for Ageing Better and external stakeholders

- Non-systematic literature and web searches

Measures were selected based on a range of criteria, including their value and usefulness as perceived by stakeholders, whether they had been tested on older populations, and if they were in use as part of national surveys and other data collections. Stakeholders were consulted both on specific topic areas or measures, particularly the quality of the identified measures and whether there were any glaring omissions, and on the overall design and functionality of the ABMF. An indicative list of stakeholders that were consulted can be found in the Appendix.

Future work

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Ongoing development and updates

We hope that the ABMF will be a useful resource for people looking for measures of individual outcomes that matter in ageing. We expect it to be, to some extent, a continuous 'work in progress', as we are advised of other and new measures to add to it. Within the framework itself there is a link to provide feedback and offer suggestions for changes or additions we could make. We will review the ABMF and any feedback received every six months and publish a new (dated) version on our website.

Influencing national policy

At a national level, we have provided versions of the ABMF to colleagues at the Office of National Statistics in their ageing division, at Public Health England working on their Productive Healthy Ageing programme, and at the Department of Health, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Innovate UK working on the Industrial Strategy Grand Challenge on Ageing, to support their thinking in terms of both how to conceptualise what matters in ageing, and which specific measures could be used to track progress.

National data collection

We will also be discussing the ABMF with these and other national bodies responsible for the funding and content of national surveys such as the Community Life Survey or the English Housing Survey, and longitudinal studies such as the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). Our consultation on the ABMF has demonstrated how important these data sources are for understanding our ageing population, one of the greatest societal changes of this century. While developments in the use of big data and novel data science approaches offer exciting opportunities to gather rich data on people's experiences and outcomes from a range of sources, for the time being at least surveys are a crucial means to gather robust data and need continued funding and support.

However, our work has also shown that the regularly-collected data we have available, and to a lesser extent even the existence of validated measures themselves, does vary across the different topics we have looked at within the ABMF. While there is relatively good data on people's employment status, for example, or people's health status, there is relatively little on whether and how people are planning and preparing for their later life, or on how people are managing significant life transitions in later life. Therefore, we will also be talking both to national bodies and to researchers about how these and other relatively poorly measured but important areas of people's experiences of ageing could be more routinely measured.

Local monitoring and evaluation

We are also making use of the ABMF at a local level. We are working with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Leeds City Council and Leeds Older People's Forum, supporting them, as well as other members of the UK Network of Age-Friendly Communities, in their use of data and measures to understand local experiences of ageing and monitor progress.

We look forward to continuing to work with these and other partners interested in measuring what matters to understand how individuals are experiencing their later life.

Appendix – stakeholders

Stakeholders consulted included:

Administrative Data Research Partnership

Age UK – Jane Vass

Beth Johnson Foundation – Lynne Wealleans

Big Society Capital – Marcus Hulme

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation – Esther Goodwin-Brown

Campaign to End Loneliness

Care & Repair – Sue Adams

Department for Work and Pensions

Essex University – Ricky Kanabar

Glasgow Caledonian University – Dawn Skelton

Greater Manchester Combined Authority – Paul McGarry

IFS – Rowena Crawford

ILC-UK – Brian Beach

University of Manchester – James Nazroo

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – Chris Goulden

Kings Fund – Dan Wellings

Leeds City Council – Lucy Jackson

Local Government Association – Sally Burlington

Manchester Mind – Ruth Rosselson

Money Advice Service – Lizzie Jordan

The National Lottery Community Fund

NHS England

NHS Scotland

NIHR

Positive Ageing – Guy Robertson

Public Health England – Nuzhat Ali

Tavistock Relationships – Sabah Khan

University of Birmingham – Jon Glasby

Various independent researchers

What Works Wellbeing – Sarah MacLennan