



THE WELLBEING PROJECT

WORKING TOGETHER *to*
DEFINE, MEASURE,
and actively **IMPROVE**
Wellbeing
IN SANTA MONICA

SUMMARY FINDINGS FROM The LOCAL WELLBEING INDEX

April 2015

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

Wellbeing in Santa Monica

How do you measure a city? It's more than square miles. Santa Monica is part of a growing global movement to measure a community's wellbeing. Countries across the globe—from Chile to the Czech Republic, Canada to the UK—are measuring wellbeing. They are now exploring how to use this information in policy-making, and community groups are striving to improve wellbeing. Santa Monica is proud to be leading the way for cities.

The Wellbeing Project

The Wellbeing Project is Santa Monica's award-winning entry in Bloomberg Philanthropies' first-ever Mayors Challenge, a competition designed to ignite innovation in local government. Recognizing that cities weren't collecting the data to fully understand residents' quality of life, Santa Monica's idea was to go beyond traditional performance measures and economic indicators and use the science of wellbeing to tell us how our city is really doing. Santa Monica is one of five cities to win Bloomberg Philanthropies' inaugural Mayors Challenge, an ideas competition that encourages cities to generate innovative ideas to solve major challenges and improve city life. At the core of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayors Challenge is the idea of innovation in government and replicability. The City of Santa Monica received \$1,000,000 to develop and implement the first local Wellbeing Index.

The Wellbeing Project brought together the leading minds in the science of wellbeing from RAND Corporation and U.K.-based research institute New Economics Foundation (nef) to develop the Index. The Wellbeing Project collaborated with a global consortium of 18 experts including representatives from the Brookings Institution, United Nations Development Program, several renowned universities and wellbeing research groups, to develop The Wellbeing Index, a framework that includes data from multiple sources across multiple dimensions to provide a comprehensive picture of wellbeing to guide local action.

The Wellbeing Project measures a city in many ways at once. It digs deep into the city's own data about what services it provides and programs it delivers. It adds Santa Monica data collected by other public and private agencies, mixes in analysis of social media posts to see what residents are saying about life in Santa Monica, and a survey to see what Santa Monica residents say about themselves. Our research teams invested more than a thousand hours filtering data across five dimensions:

- **Community:** Often described as "social capital," a community with strong connections among its inhabitants can flourish in good times and withstand the tough ones.
- **Place:** The characteristics of the area in which people live—physical, social, environmental and economic—affect how wellbeing is fostered and supported.
- **Learning:** Education is linked to virtually all wellbeing outcomes, but even beyond measures of high school or college graduations, lifelong learning in and out of the classroom is a key factor of wellbeing.
- **Health:** Being and feeling healthy—or at least having the tools and resources needed to manage any health challenges—are essential to an overall sense of wellbeing.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Economic conditions, including opportunities for upward mobility, are key to creating a community in which a diverse population can live and thrive.

These measures are further framed through our understanding of individual wellbeing, which we included as an additional dimension of measurement—Outlook. Outlook assesses personal wellbeing—how residents feel about their lives, their levels of life satisfaction, and their day-to-day emotions. Measuring wellbeing through these dimensions is a dynamic way of figuring out more quickly and more precisely what will make Santa Monica thrive, providing the city with targeted information to act on the causes and conditions which improve quality of life.

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

Why wellbeing and why these dimensions?

Wellbeing research has exposed the fallacy of believing that an increase in economic output or other traditional prosperity measures will naturally coincide with an increase in people's quality of life. Santa Monica is part of a global movement that recognizes 20th century tools for assessing prosperity and progress are not always sufficient for the 21st century. We need new measures to ensure that we as a city are making decisions and setting priorities that can positively affect residents' wellbeing.

Wellbeing science is valuable for three reasons. First it helps us focus on the things that make the most difference in people's lives. This helps ensure we're not overlooking important things just because they have been undervalued in the past. Second, it helps us manage the trade-offs between different objectives, all of which may contribute to wellbeing but which may conflict with each other (for example environmental and economic objectives). And third, wellbeing science can help in identifying positive feedback loops and the interventions that encourage them: health and prosperity contribute to wellbeing, and increased wellbeing also contributes to health and the productivity behind economic prosperity. Wellbeing science can help reveal these loops and how to strengthen them.

There are two primary benefits for measuring wellbeing along these dimensions. First, they highlight focus areas for wellbeing awareness and education. And, the data behind the dimensions help to identify possible priorities, as well as the kinds of policies, resource allocation, research and use of wellbeing science needed to move these priorities forward.

Why did we choose to include many forms of data?

Santa Monica's project is distinctive in that we have drawn on many forms of data to gain greater insight into wellbeing as a whole. Traditional health assessment, quality of life, and wellbeing efforts globally have been based on a single type of data. In contrast, we collected data from a multitude of city departments, private organizations and national data sources like the U.S. Census to paint a detailed picture of the infrastructure and services being provided in Santa Monica. Our wellbeing survey collected information on objective aspects of life, like how residents rated services in Santa Monica or how many times a week they exercise. It also asked questions about residents' subjective experiences as individuals. Social media—a key component of local government's toolbox for assessing public sentiment and monitoring how the community is doing—also provided useful, unfiltered data. To better understand the full picture of Santa Monica wellbeing, we are analyzing data according to zip code and census tract, as well as by age group, ethnicity, gender and other demographics where possible.

Cities must leverage all of the data they routinely collect about residents, services, and programs. Local government has an important role to play in promoting the existence of conditions to support individuals' desires to improve their personal wellbeing—which in turn enhances community wellbeing. The diversity of our data sources will enable us to paint a fuller picture of wellbeing and of the areas in which city leaders can further develop assets and target needs.

What do we know about wellbeing in Santa Monica after looking at the data?

Santa Monica has a reputation as an idyllic beach community—and the data shows our many strengths. Most survey respondents report good health, are engaged in their communities, and feel happy most of the time. Many residents have above average educational attainment and incomes. Santa Monica residents vote and volunteer at higher rates than other Californians and Americans. They report great pride in their community and the beauty of their surroundings. These are all features that contribute to individual and community wellbeing, and need to be cultivated.

The data also make clear, however, that Santa Monica is a city of great diversity, and there is work to do in many areas to advance and enhance wellbeing for all. The Wellbeing Project seeks to focus on those opportunities for *further* bolstering wellbeing in the city.

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

In the next sections, we summarize key findings by priority theme areas, and potential next steps are suggested. Additional details about process (methods) and data are summarized in other products (including our documented briefing presentation slides), and thus are not presented here.

Community-Wide Wellbeing Findings

Many in our community lack strong social connections and a sense of neighborhood cohesion.

The Wellbeing Project's analysis of the three key measure areas of the *Community* dimension—strong local networks, civic engagement, and community identity along with data on residents' *Outlook* yielded a number of compelling findings. We found that a surprisingly large percentage of Santa Monica residents report feeling that they have very little influence on local decision-making, even though Santa Monica residents vote and volunteer at higher-than-average rates. Many residents act to improve their community, but there remains a sense of detachment and distrust between many residents and their neighbors. Research shows these relationships are important drivers of individual and community resilience, particularly in times of need. And while a national survey found that four in five Americans (80%) say there are people they can count on in their neighborhoods, only about half (56%) of Santa Monica residents said the same thing.

This lack of community connection shows up in other findings:

- 13% of Santa Monica residents see their friends or relatives socially less than once a month
- 47% of those who are sick or disabled see friends or relatives less than once a month
- 48% of residents regularly stopped and talked to neighbors, compared to 65% in the UK

And among the more atypical outcomes, while young adults (aged 18-24) typically report the highest levels of personal wellbeing, in Santa Monica it's older residents who have the strongest community connections. Young adults in Santa Monica have some of the lowest personal wellbeing scores, with one in five saying they feel lonely most or all of the time.

Santa Monicans are not as healthy as we may have expected.

The Wellbeing Project's findings related to health crosses two dimensions. *Place*, which measured Santa Monica residents' experience of the built, natural, and social environment and *Health*, which looked at things like healthy behaviors, physical and emotional health status, and access to health promoting resources. Delving into the data revealed a surprising lack of healthy activity and eating by residents. For example, despite enviable year-round weather and the wide availability of local parks, recreational facilities and bike paths/lanes—not to mention a world-renowned state beach—more than half of Santa Monica residents (52%) said they do not engage in daily physical activity of some type. Of concern as well is that just 30% of Santa Monica's children were very physically ready for school in 2014, a decrease from the 32.3% reported in 2013. On the brighter side, Santa Monica's reported levels of physical exercise are 5% higher than the average for LA County. And nearly 85% of our 5th, 7th and 9th grade students are able to pass Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District's annual health fitness exam.

There are findings about some chronic health outcomes that are concerning as well. The rate of Santa Monica residents reporting they suffer from asthma is 14%, higher than Los Angeles County's 12%. And the rate of Santa Monica residents reporting heart disease (7.2%) is also higher than the countywide rate (5.9%). And with growing research indicating the impacts of stress on physical and mental health, it is notable that almost one-third (28%) of respondents report experiencing stress some or all of the time.

In addition, despite the accessibility of fresh produce in Santa Monica at our weekly farmers markets, only about one in four (24%) Santa Monica residents say they eat five or more portions of fruit or vegetables a day. Nationally, more than twice as many people (55%) say the same. No single

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

subgroup in Santa Monica was found to consume produce at the national rate. The Wellbeing Project learned males and young adults in particular eat the least produce.

Additional findings about healthy eating in Santa Monica:

- Healthy eating is strongest in downtown 90401 – 32% eating five or more portions daily
- Lowest produce consumption in 90404 (16%), and among the Latino population (19%)
- People who travel to work by bus consume less produce

Mobility and development changes have the potential to boost or decrease wellbeing.

The examination of data in the *Place* and *Economic Opportunity* dimensions including how people get around the city, whether they feel they have access to the things they want in their neighborhoods, and how concerned they are about being able to afford to stay in Santa Monica, revealed a number of insights. Sixty-one percent of residents drive alone to work, findings showed there has been a sizable increase in the rate of bike commuters (67% from 2011 to 2013) and nearly two in three Santa Monica residents (66%) live within a five-minute walk of goods and services. These results show that progress is being made, but there is room for further improvement.

Issues around mobility made up the largest percentage of suggestions from survey participants when asked how they would improve wellbeing for themselves or for the community. This included better strategies for traffic mitigation and street noise, as well as concerns about how changing transportation patterns would impact commute times. These mobility concerns may also contribute to the relatively low usage of the outdoors (an important driver of wellbeing) in Santa Monica. Over a third of survey respondents reported spending leisure time out of doors less than once a week, and more than half (55%) spend leisure time in community or public space less than once a week.

Santa Monica is often perceived as a wealthy city, but income inequality and some of the highest housing costs in the country mean that affordability is a challenge for a large portion of residents. Our research showed us just how pressing an issue this was; 53% of survey respondents felt it was unlikely that their children would be able to afford to stay in Santa Monica, 37% of residents aged 18-34 reported concern about missing rent or mortgage payments, and our social media analysis showed us that discussions of jobs, hiring and employment issues were the most frequently cited in Twitter analyses of economic opportunity discussions.

Demographic Findings

There are challenges in understanding the unique needs and strengths of specific populations within our community (by age, gender, geography, and race or ethnicity) using the city's traditional methods of data collection. Disaggregated data of the type collected by The Wellbeing Project is important to more completely understanding our residents' wellbeing, and to developing tailored and effective policies and programs to address their needs.

Younger residents report some difficulties in wellbeing, particularly related to community connection and overall personal outlook or wellbeing.

On several dimensions, particularly *Community* and *Economic Opportunity*, wellbeing is low among younger age groups (18-34). Combining all the dimensions into a single wellbeing score from survey findings, the youngest age groups have the lowest wellbeing. This is surprising—in most surveys in the US and other countries, young people tend to have the highest levels of wellbeing. More than a third (35%) of 18-34 year olds report feeling stressed all or most of the time (compared to less than 10% for the oldest residents), and 12% of 24-44 year olds say they never or almost never have energy. Perhaps not surprisingly, younger residents report having more economic worry about paying bills and meeting mortgage or rent payments—more than a third (37%) report having at least one economic worry, compared to less than 30% for the general population. In our findings, the age group that generally scored highest on overall wellbeing is 65-74.

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

The social media data suggest Santa Monica residents are interested in employment, but it's unclear from Twitter data (due to uneven demographic information reported by Twitter users) what age groups are involved. If, as expected, these social-media messages are from younger people, it's possible their focus on jobs is because their pay is lower because they are at the beginning of their careers. Survey and city data also reflect younger adults are less frequent users of the city's enrichment programs, activities which could encourage a sense of community.

Latino residents report low wellbeing overall.

One in five (20%) Santa Monica residents come from minority backgrounds. Latinos (both white and non-white) are about 14% of the population. Although other minority groups had low scores on certain indicators (e.g. African-Americans on school results and economic worries, Asians on community wellbeing), Latinos consistently scored lowest across multiple dimensions of wellbeing.

Some of the greatest differences noted were in the *Economic Opportunity* dimension. For example, about one in eight (13%) Latinos reported being very worried about paying their housing costs, compared to just 6% of non-Latinos. There are other differences as well: thirty percent of Latinos reported seldom having time to do the things they enjoyed, compared with 21% of non-Latinos; 21% of Latinos participated in physical activity less than once a month, compared to 11% of non-Latinos. Moreover, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District data indicated lower levels of educational proficiency among Latino youth as measured by standardized exams and other measures. Demographics show that Latino residents tend to be concentrated in certain areas of the city, which also report higher levels of those factors that detract from wellbeing (crime, noise, poor housing quality). This indicates a need to further examine what factors contribute to the wellbeing differences between racial and ethnic groups.

Wellbeing strengths and needs differ by zip code.

Santa Monica has a higher median yearly family income (\$75,000) than the \$54,000 median for the US as a whole—but there are significant differences between zip codes. Average annual household income in 90402 is just under \$150,000 and just over \$50,000 in 90404. Unemployment levels in 90404, 90401 and 90405 are higher than the US average. Overall levels of wellbeing from the survey reflect some of this pattern, with the lowest levels in 90401 and 90404. We noted the higher presence of wellbeing detractors (crime, vacant or crowded housing, etc.) particularly in 90401. On the other hand, residents of 90402 generally report higher wellbeing than people in other zip codes in side-by-side comparisons across age groups.

Not all zip code variations follow income differences. For example, 90405 does particularly well on sense of community, while 90403 does well on health. On produce consumption, residents of 90401 consume more than 90403 and 90405, while 90401 performs better than 90405 on 3rd grade English proficiency. In addition 90404, the area with the lowest average household income, has the highest participation rate in adult education and does particularly well in the *Learning* dimension.

While there are few differences between men and women in Santa Monica with respect to overall wellbeing, there are some areas that would benefit from focus.

There were limited City data disaggregated by gender across all dimensions, but using survey data we were able to discover some disparities. Women in Santa Monica scored higher than men in some dimensions based on survey data—*Community, Health* and *Learning*. Women reported particularly high fruit and vegetable consumption (30% eating five a day compared to only 19% for men). On the other hand, women reported less frequent physical activity, less time to do the things they enjoy, more economic worries, and more sad feelings compared to men. Men reported not volunteering as much, not putting time and effort into the community, and not stopping to talk with neighbors as frequently as women. When examining use of community supports, such as libraries or city classes, there was no significant difference in participation between men and women.

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

Housing is an issue for one in five Santa Monica residents.

Developing and protecting affordable housing has been a longstanding policy priority in Santa Monica. We found continued room for improvement as a significant minority of Santa Monica residents is affected by housing-related issues. One-fifth is concerned about missing mortgage or rent payments—a problem which is particularly prevalent in the Latino population (38%), for younger people (36% of those 18 to 24), and for those without full-time work. Meanwhile, 18% are dissatisfied with their housing—especially in zip codes 90401 and 90404 (24% and 26% of respondents in each zip code respectively).

Summary

The Wellbeing Index findings provide both expected and unexpected insights into the community. Some validate long-held beliefs about Santa Monica, some are surprising or counterintuitive to the “conventional wisdom,” and some reveal areas of concern or issues, that until now we have not been able to measure. Santa Monica’s residents are diverse. So are the attitudes, experiences and expectations that affect their personal wellbeing. They have different experiences of the many factors which make up wellbeing across the dimensions. Wellbeing measurement is multi-dimensional, with intersections and influence beyond a single metric. And the actions to improve wellbeing must address strengths and needs in many ways, encompassing action across dimensions and by individuals and institutions alike.

Next Steps: Where do we go from here?

The Index provides a higher resolution portrait of how well decisions and policies work by providing a baseline metric of wellbeing to inform policies, focus resources, and catalyze partnerships with the goal of helping all individuals and groups achieve positive progress more quickly. The Index will allow the City of Santa Monica to consider new data about how people are doing with real and measurable factors. Wellbeing Index findings will enhance the city’s ability to work with the community to strengthen the quality of life in Santa Monica.

Next steps include:

- launching an online platform to disseminate the Index
- presenting the findings to the City Council to inform the upcoming budget
- staff workshops to analyze findings and develop city policy and program responses
- communicating to community, neighborhood, business and civic groups about the Index
- refining the data collection process to further develop the Wellbeing Index

We also look forward to sharing this work with other cities - so that we may both contribute to and learn from the emerging knowledge about wellbeing. Materials about the processes (methods) and information to assist in use of the Index in other cities will be developed. Most importantly, all next steps will be geared towards using this new information to increase the effectiveness of government about things that matter most to people.

There is much more to learn

This document contains just a small sample of the findings discovered in our research. Further data and detailed information about our findings are available at www.smgov.net/wellbeing.