

# The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

## - What does it offer policy makers?

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• Dr Kate Lycett



# Overview

1. Why do we care about subjective wellbeing?
2. What is subjective wellbeing and how do we measure it?
3. The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index
4. What does it offer policy makers?

Why do we care about  
subjective wellbeing?

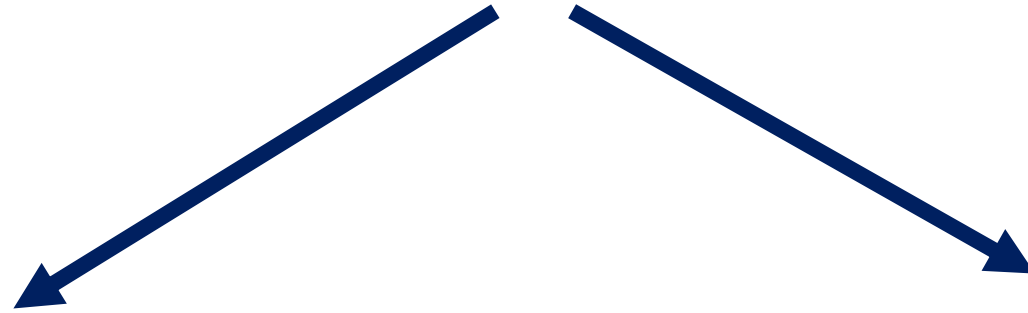


Ah yes...  
the economy  
has never been  
healthier

And the drugs  
needed to  
cope with it  
have never been  
more affordable...

Lenny

# A happy life depends on two types of resources



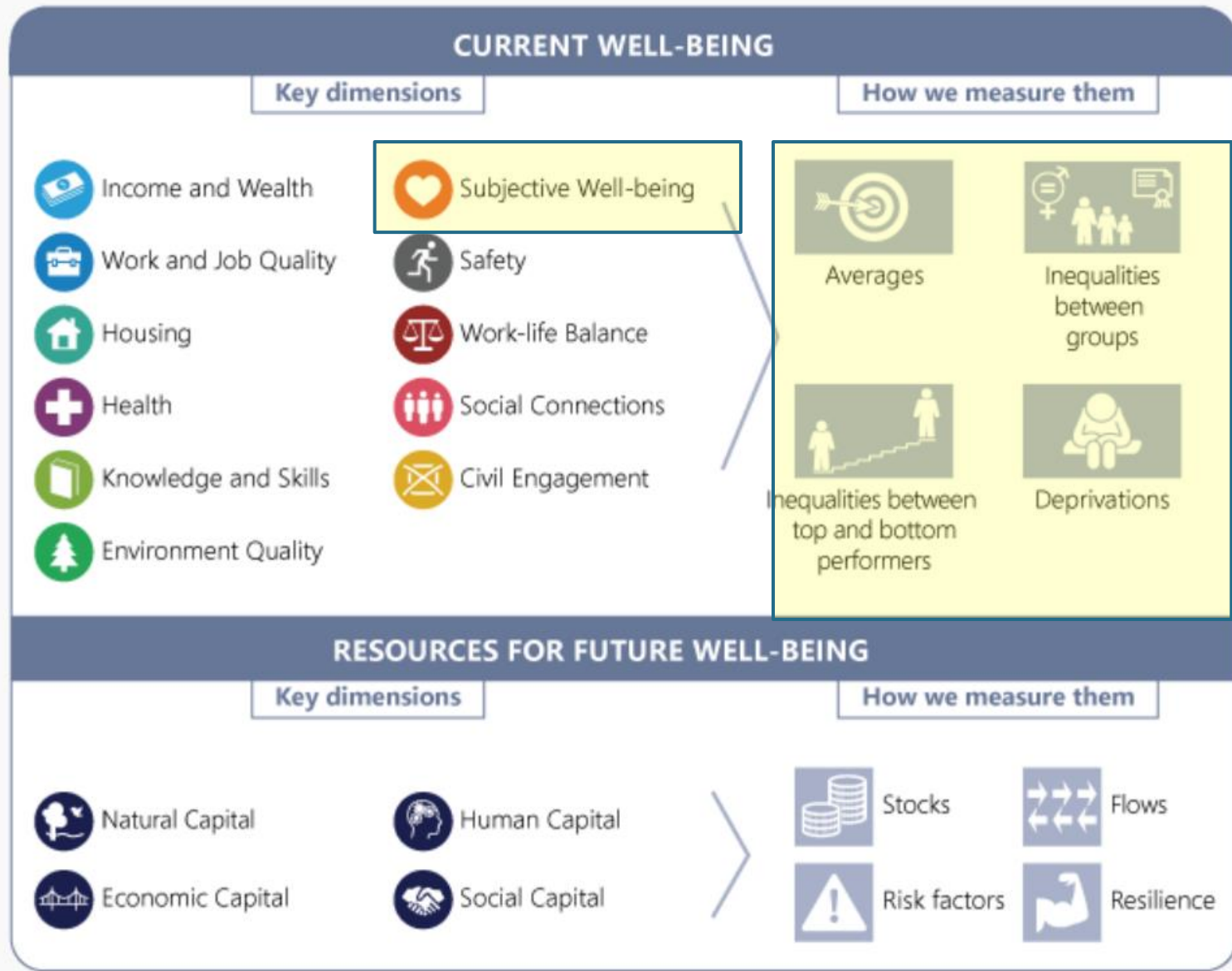
Objective Conditions  
(eg physical wealth, health, etc.)

Subjective Perceptions  
(eg Satisfaction with wealth, health, etc.)



Subjective wellbeing  
**How you feel about yourself**

# OECD well-being framework



What is subjective  
wellbeing and how can  
we measure it?

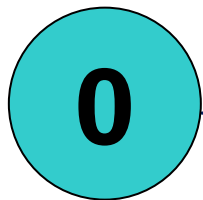
## ***Subjective wellbeing***

A *normally positive* state of mind that involves the *whole life experience*.

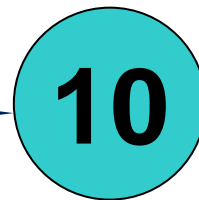
# Global Life Satisfaction (1 item)

*'Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with **your life as a whole?**'*

No Satisfaction  
at all



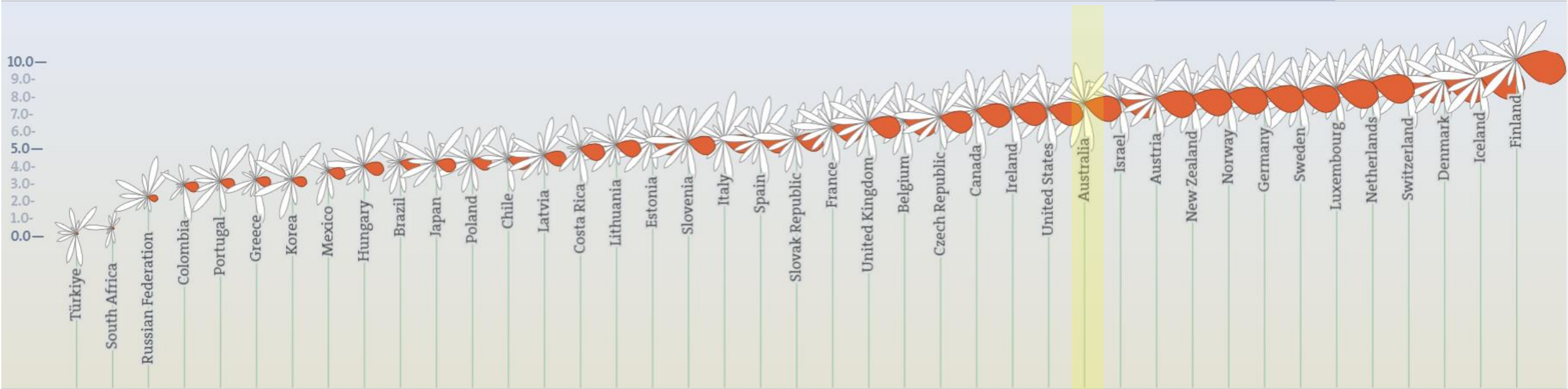
Complete  
satisfaction



**Table 1. Policy areas covered in national frameworks**

OECD Domains	New Zealand	Canada	United Kingdom	Germany	Iceland	Italy	Wales	Scotland
Current Well-being	Income and Wealth							
	Social Connections							
	Knowledge and Skills							
	Environmental Quality							
	Health							
	Housing							
	Civic Engagement							
	Safety							
	Work and Job Quality							
	Work-Life Balance							
	Subjective Well-being							

Source: National agencies; Centre for Policy Development (2022), 'Redefining Progress'



# Life Satisfaction

# ABS's General Social Survey



Residents in Australia  
aged 15 and over.  
Targets low socio-  
economic areas



Households  
randomly selected  
from each selected  
area



One person  
randomly selected  
in each household



Survey taken online,  
or via a telephone  
interview

# Multi-dimensional measures

→ Often too long for national surveys or narrow in focus (i.e. hedonic or eudamonic)

## Eudamonic measures

- Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) - (Ryff et al 1989) - 42 items
- Flourishing Index (Huppert and So, 2011) - 10 items

## Affective measures

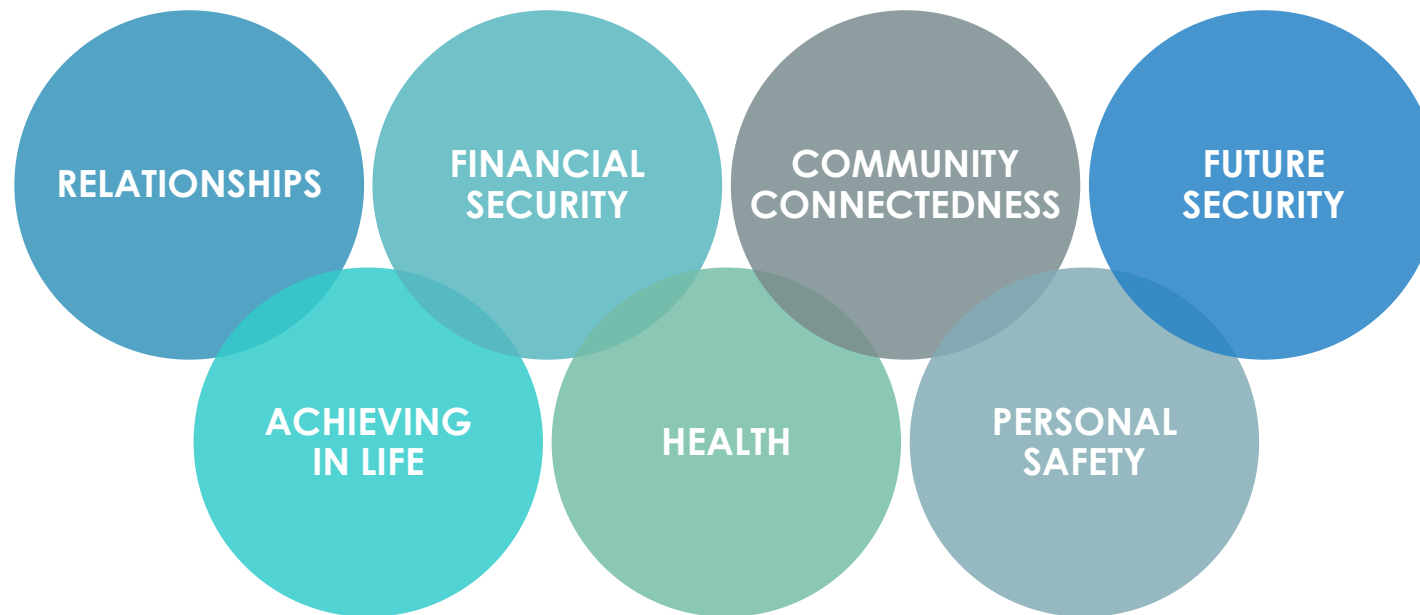
- Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) - 20 items or PANAS SF – 10 items
- Huppert et al. (2009) - 15 items

## Evaluative measures

- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) - (Diener, 1984) - 5 items
- Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) - (International Wellbeing Group, 2005) - 7 items

# The Personal Wellbeing Index

How satisfied are you with your-----?



# The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index



## Founders:

- Derek McMillan
- Jackie Van Vugt
- Robert A. Cummins
- Richard Eckersley

# History of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index



**Robert A. Cummins**

Emeritus Professor of  
Psychology Deakin University

- Longstanding partnership between Deakin and Australian Unity
- 39 cross-sectional surveys over 20+ years (2001-2022)
- 74,253 respondents in total

# The Australian Unity Wellbeing Surveys

Geographically representative annual cross-sectional samples

Age: 18+ years

N = 2,000

Telephone interview (~11 mins)

#1: April-Jun 2001

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#39: May-Jun 2022

# The surveys

- **Demographics**

- **Subjective wellbeing**

  - Personal**

    - Global life satisfaction (1 item)
    - Personal Wellbeing Index (7 items)

  - National**

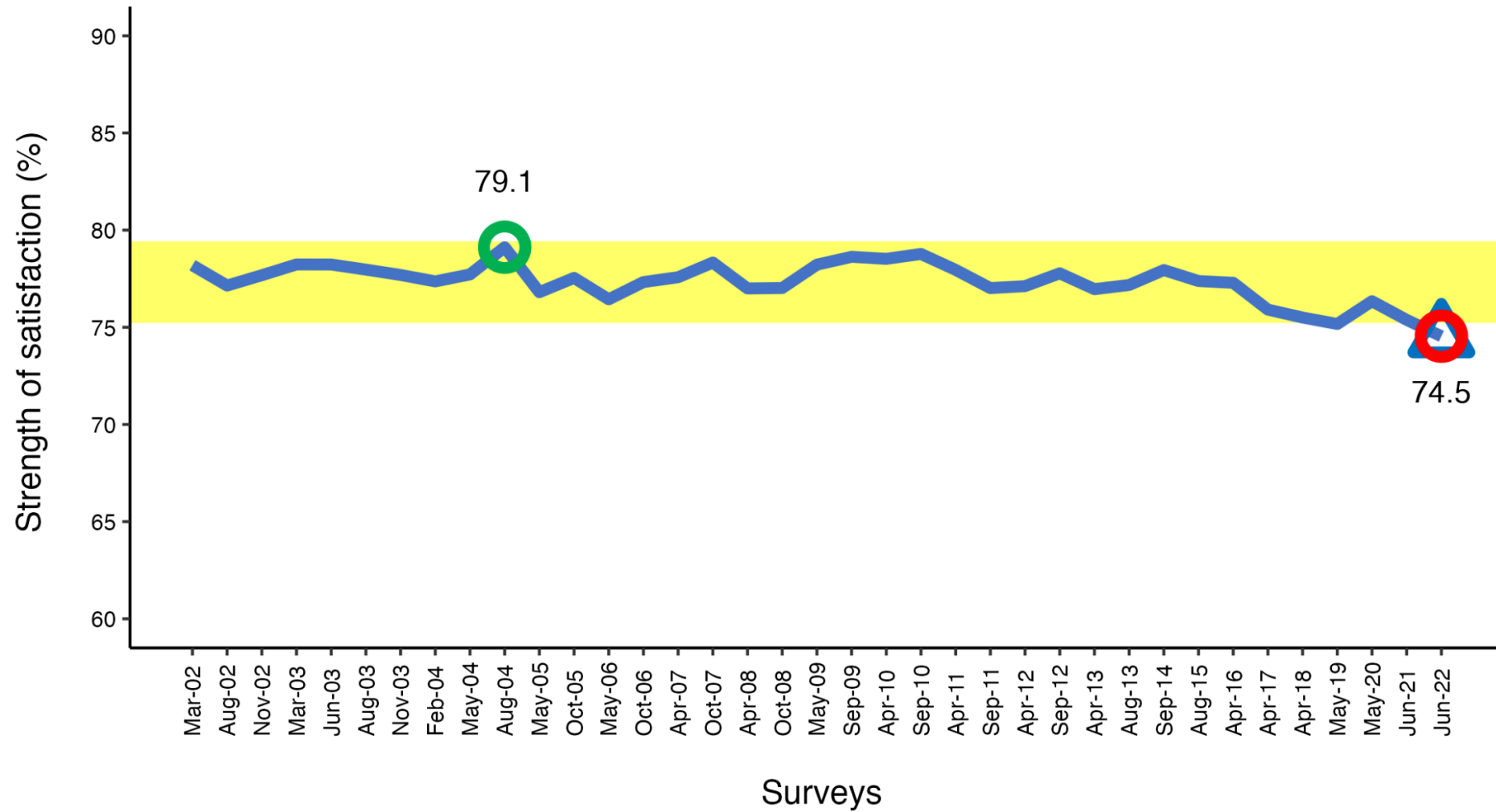
    - Global national satisfaction (1 item)
    - National Wellbeing Index ( 6 items)

- **Special interest areas**

  - **Example: mental distress, social connections, climate change**

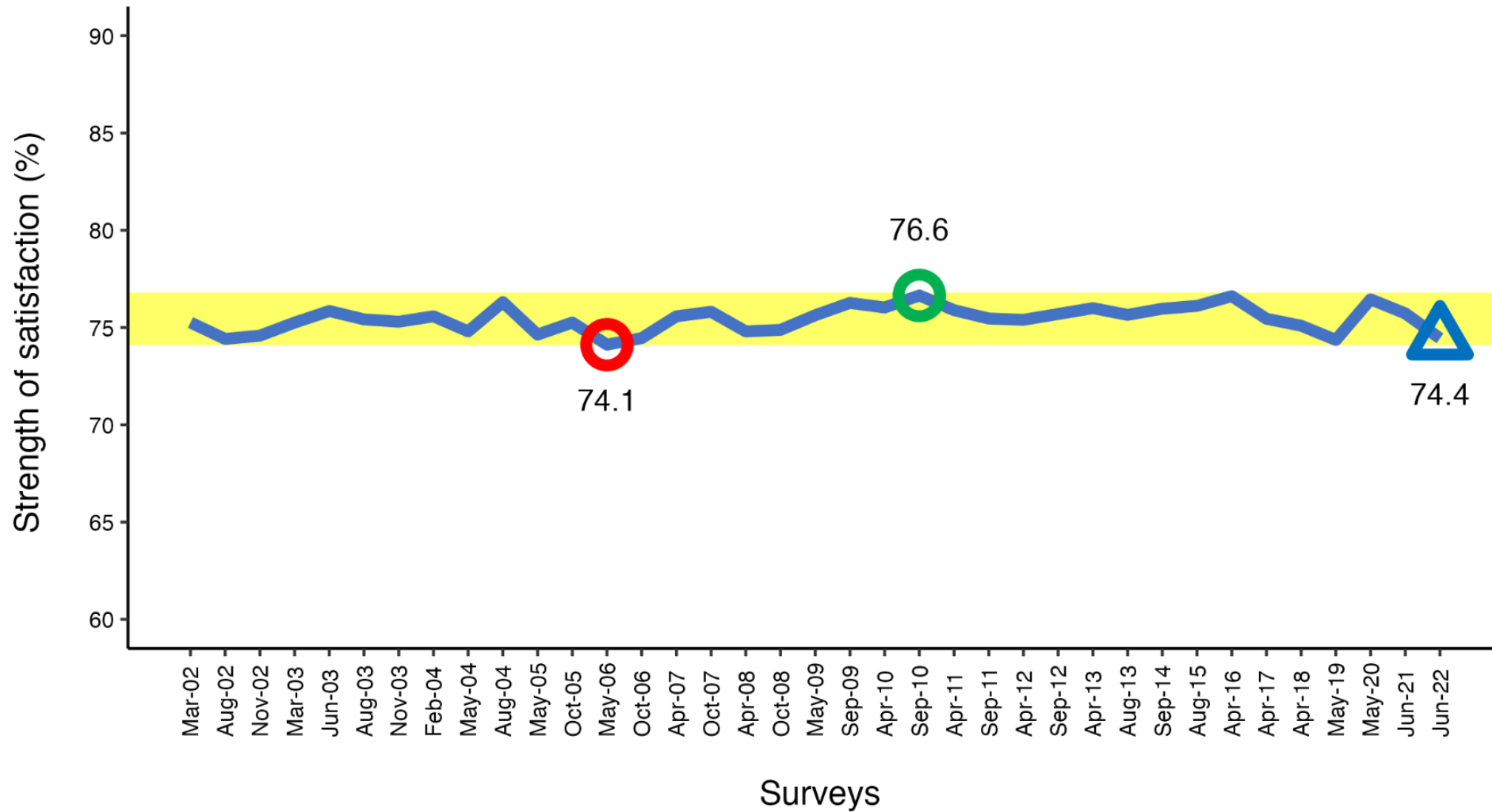
# Global Life Satisfaction

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



# Personal Wellbeing Index

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



# What good is a measure if it barely changes over time?

## Redefining progress

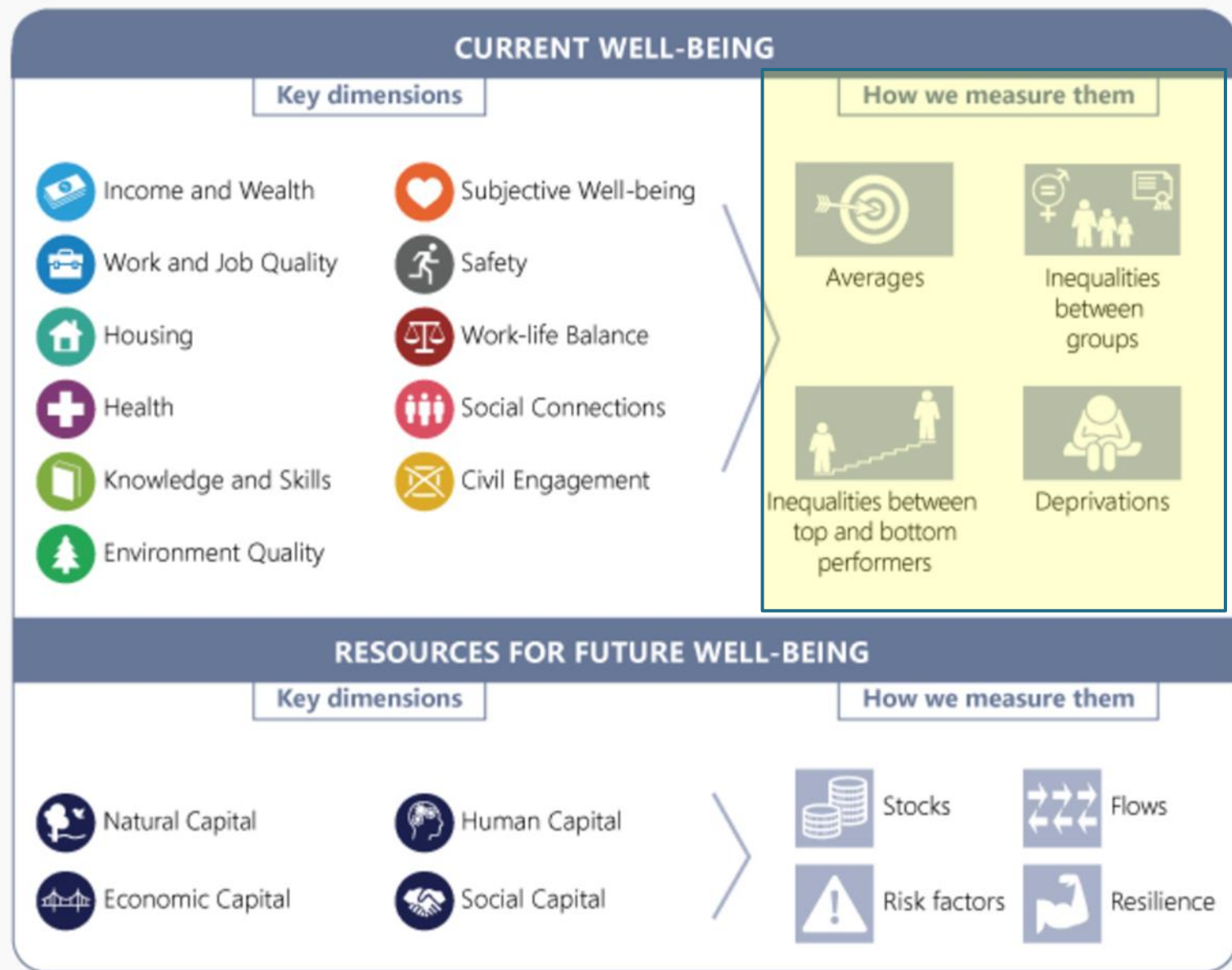
Global lessons for an Australian approach to wellbeing



One *challenge* for subjective measures is subjective wellbeing ‘*homeostasis*’ ...is the principle that subjective wellbeing has a *tendency to return to a set point even after negative or positive spikes*, making it hard to use subjective wellbeing to compare the *long-term impacts of policy interventions* on wellbeing (Armenta et al, 2014; Frederick and Loewenstein, 1999).

→ Look outside the normative range

## OECD well-being framework



# Well-being by occupation, 2019 to 2021

People who were unemployed reported significantly higher well-being in 2020.

2019 2020 2021

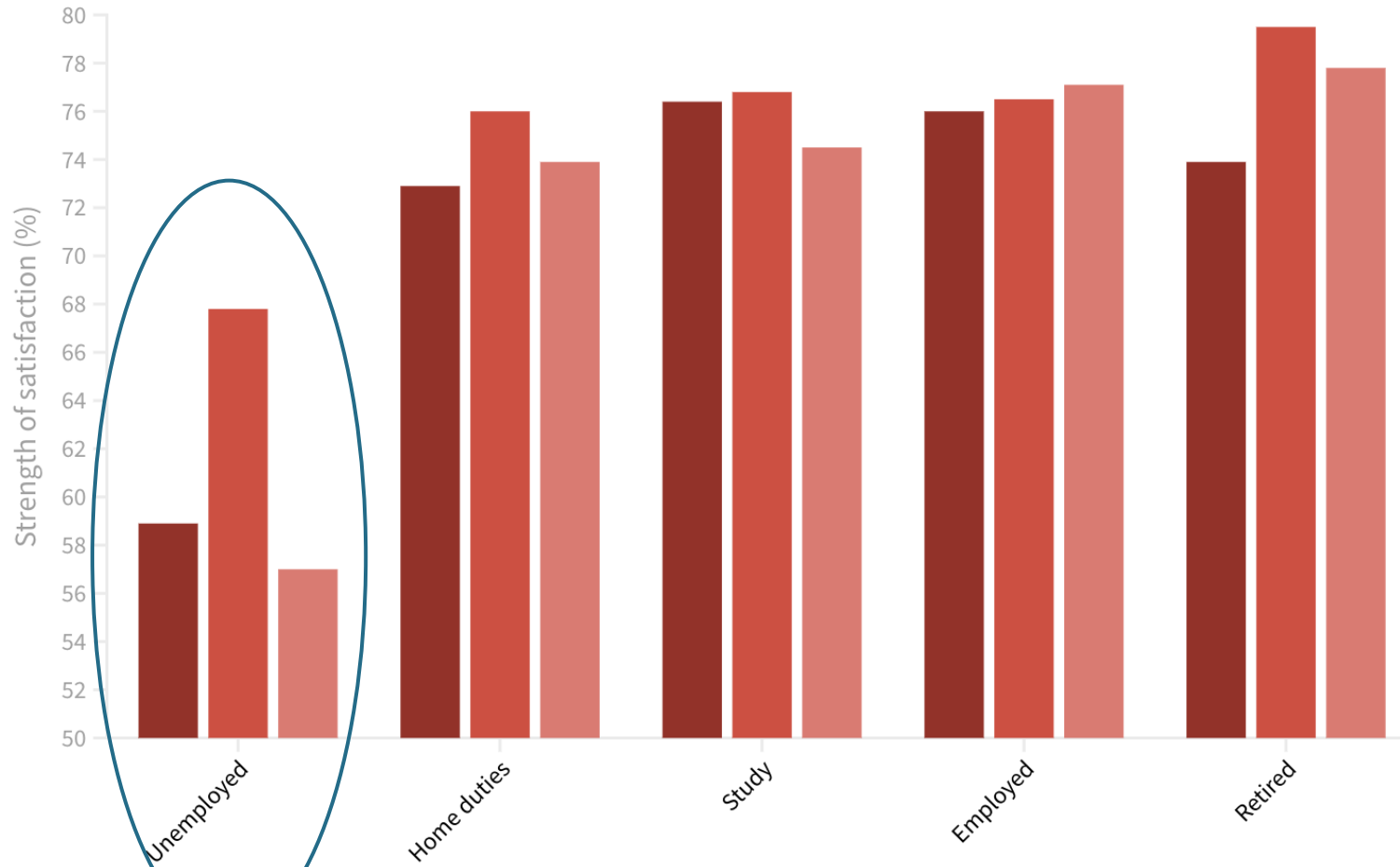


Chart: The Conversation / Source: Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

# Well-being by income, 2019 to 2021

People on lower incomes had bigger increases in subjective well-being in 2020.

2019 2020 2021

2019 2020 2021

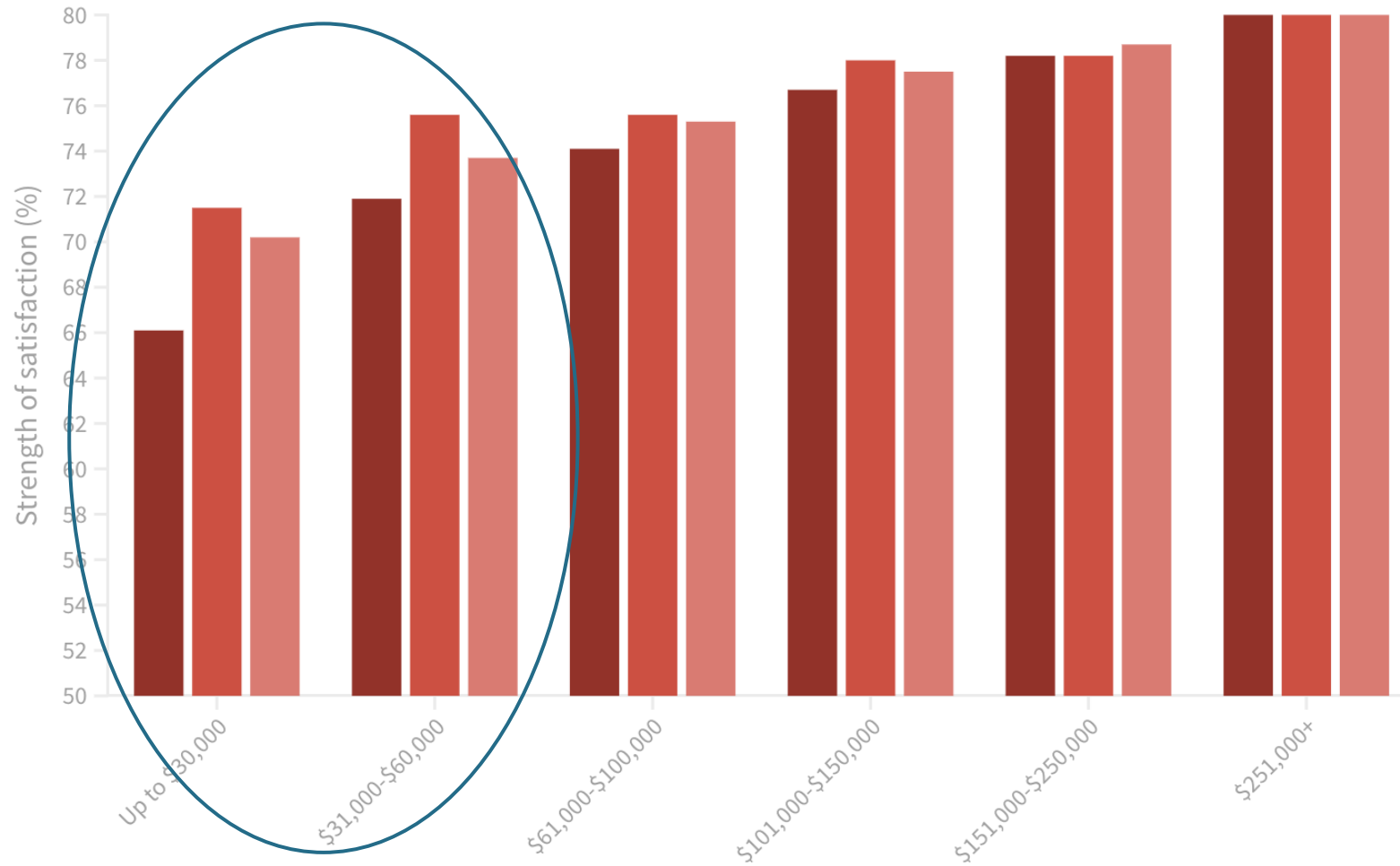


Chart: The Conversation / Source: Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

# Golden Triangle

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achieving in life
- Safety
- Community
- Relationships
- Future security



**How satisfied are you with  
your life as a whole?**

## Well-being by change in household income, 2021

Losses affect us more than gains. Those whose incomes rose were, on average, no more satisfied than those with level incomes.

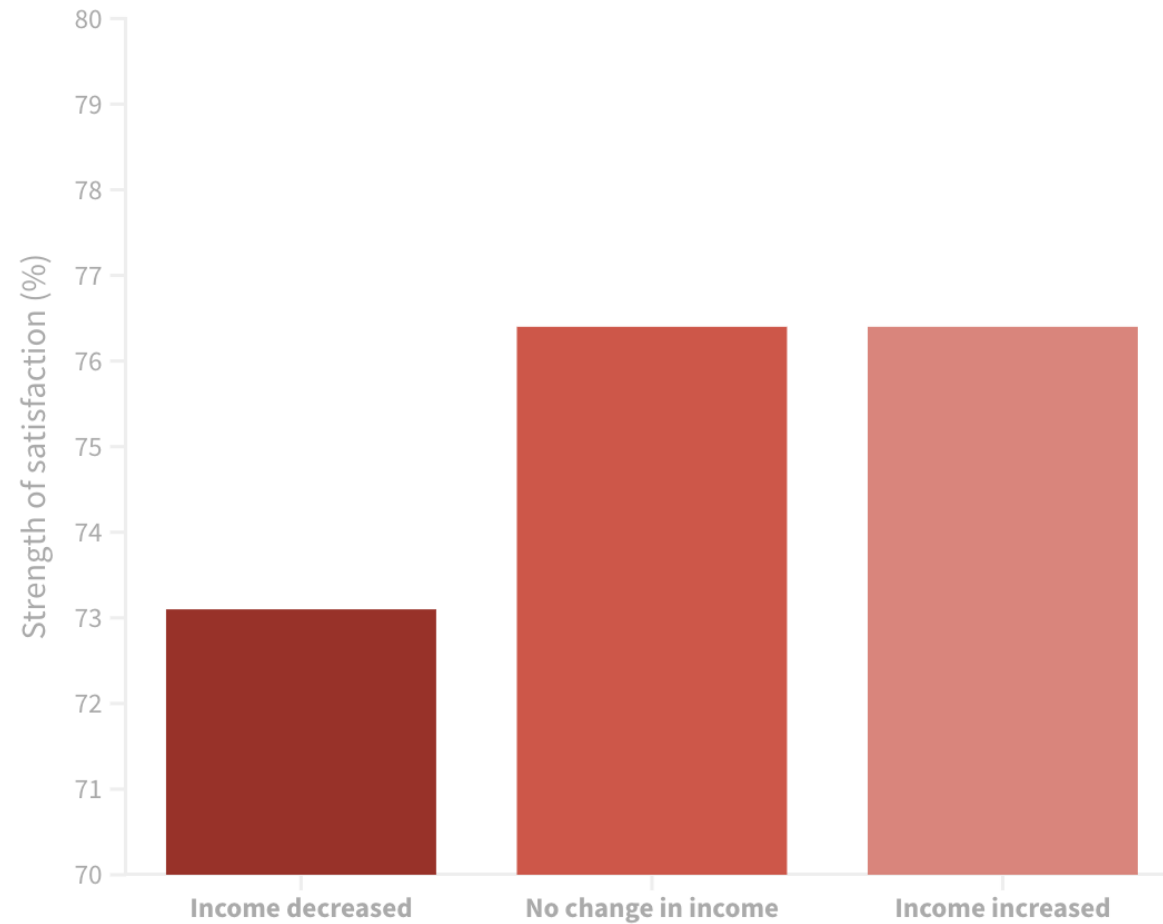
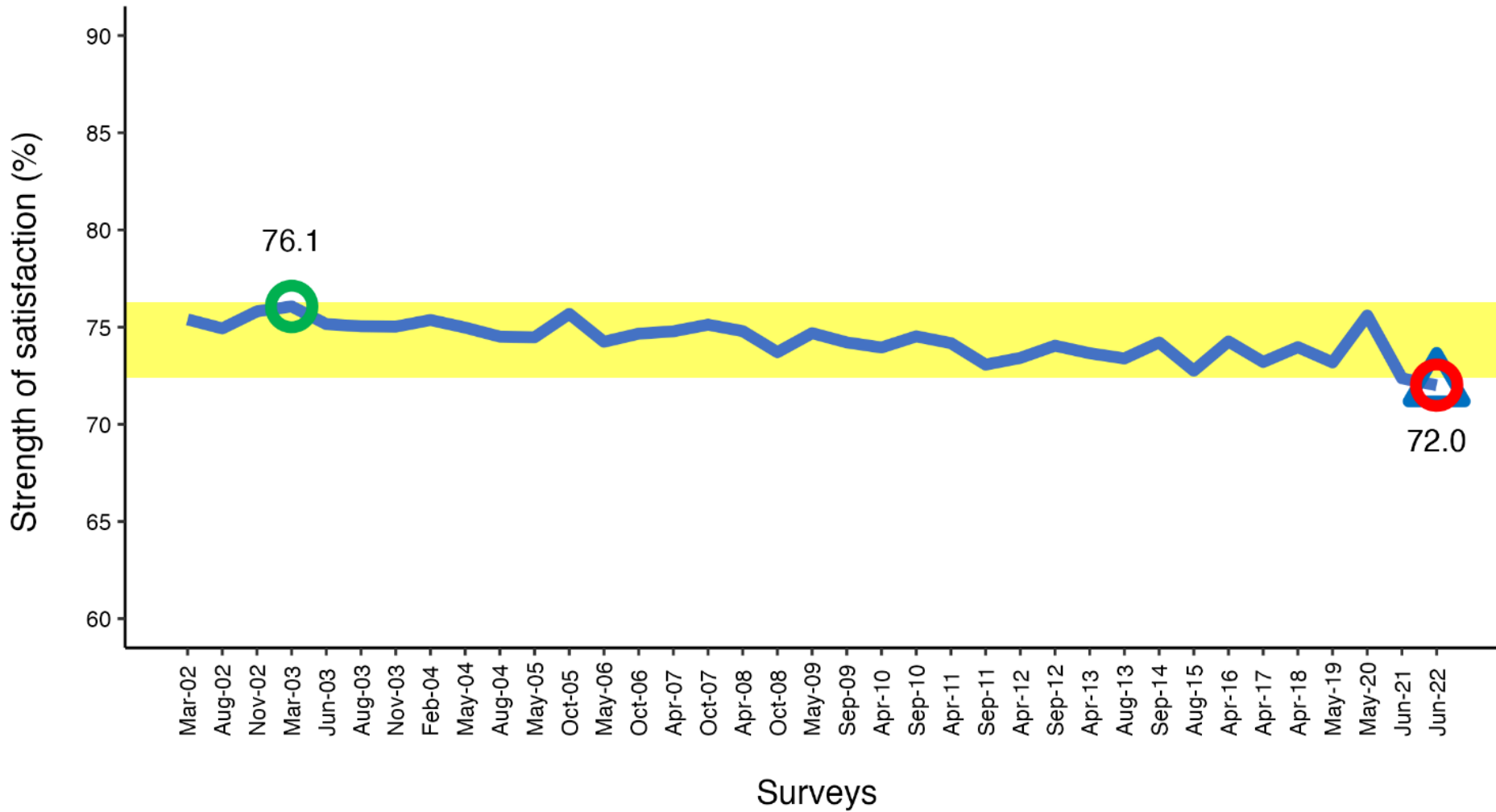


Chart: The Conversation / Source: Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

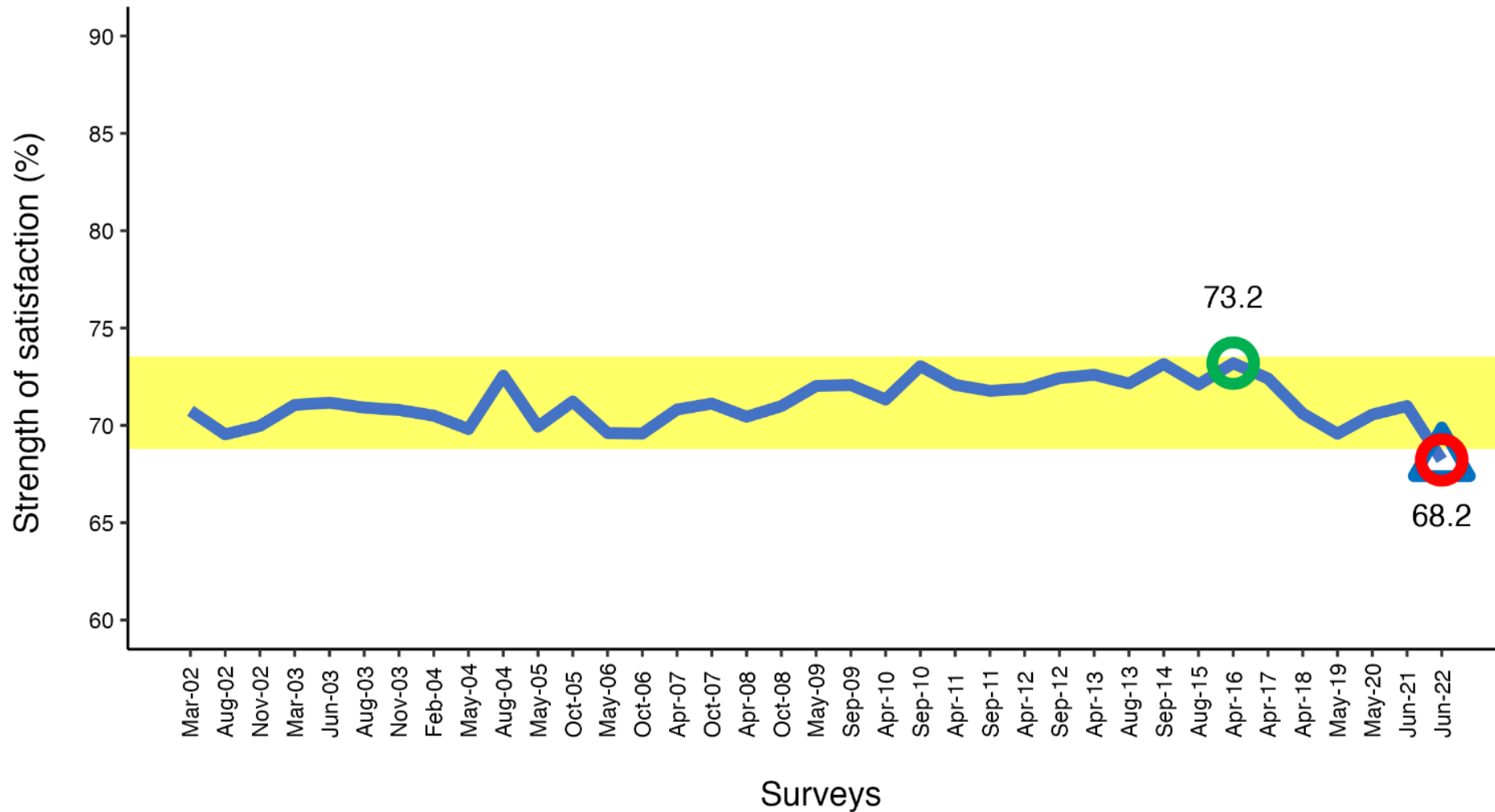
# Satisfaction with Health

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



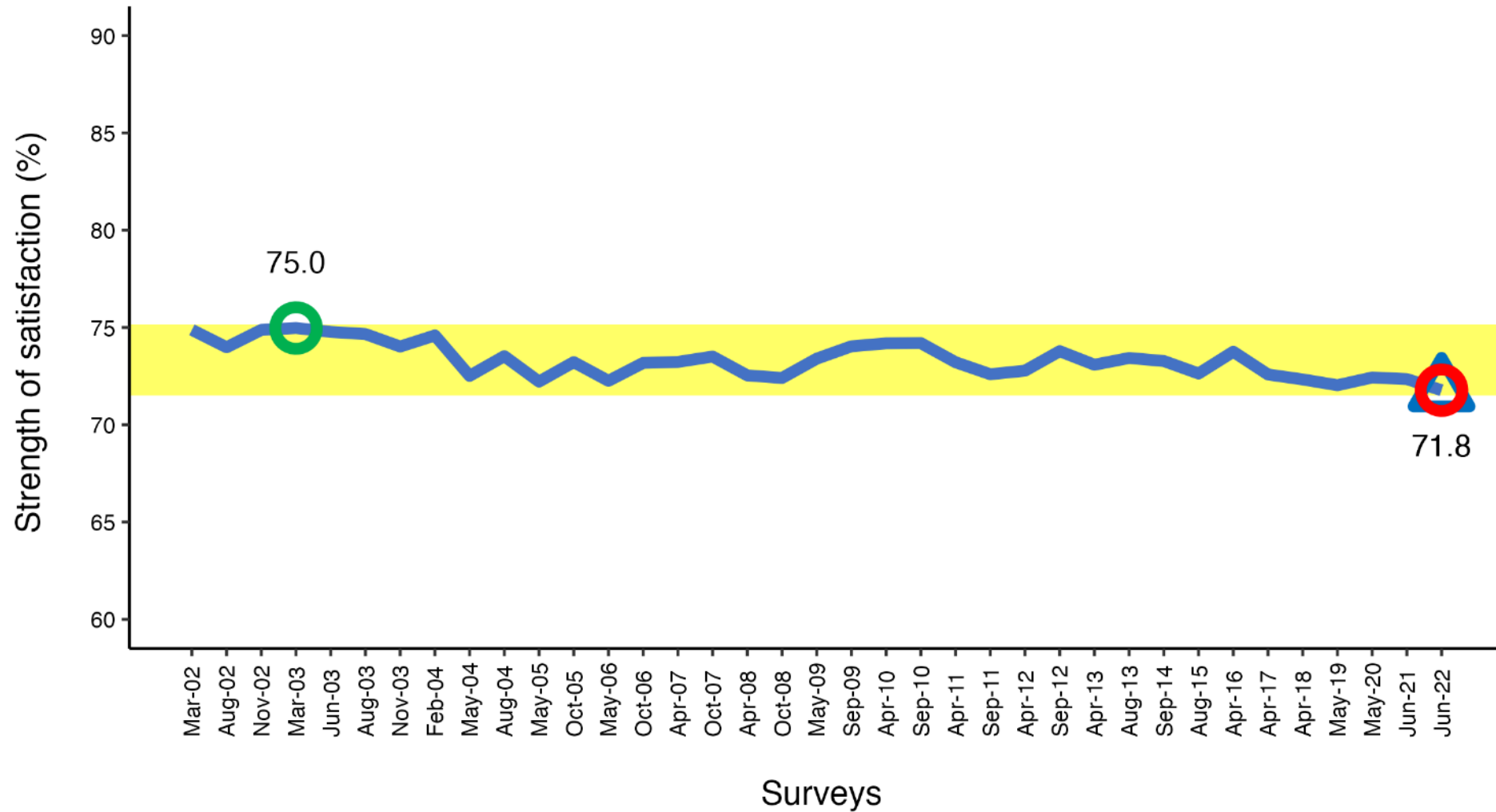
# Satisfaction with Community Connectedness

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



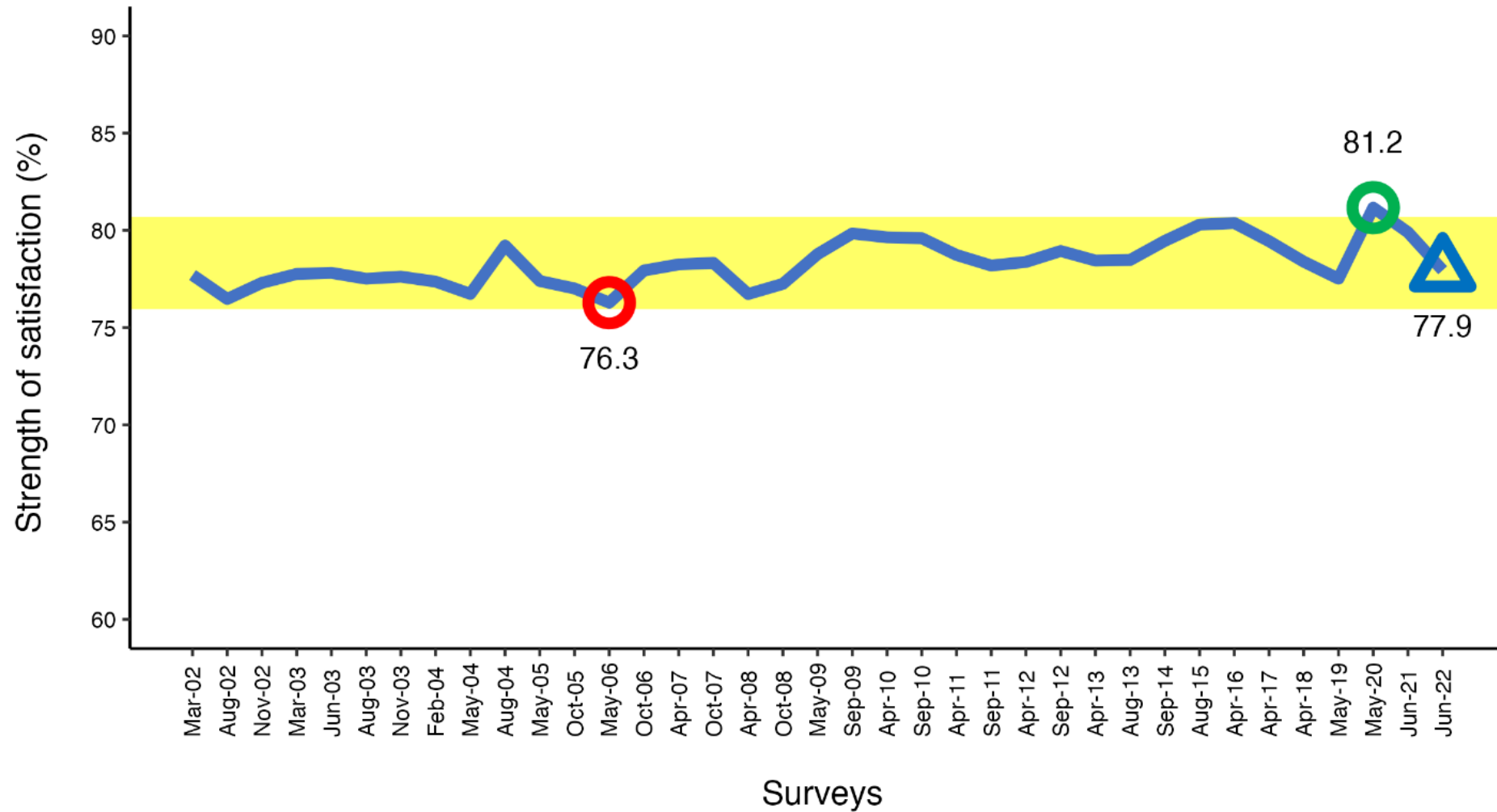
# Satisfaction with Achieving in Life

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



# Satisfaction with Standard of Living

△ Latest ○ Max ○ Min ■ Normative Range



What does the Australian Unity  
Wellbeing Index offer to policy  
makers?

#### **Box 4.1 – What makes a good progress and well-being indicator?**

According to the OECD and the internationally-accepted Civitas initiative, indicators should be:

- **Relevant:** indicators should be relevant to policy priorities.
- **Complete:** indicators should adequately cover all policy priorities.
- **Measurable:** indicators should have the potential for objective measurement.
- **Comparable:** indicators should be defined and measured consistently, to enable comparisons within a country and internationally.
- **Reliable:** preference should be given to indicators underpinned by objective and accurate data, which is not subject to different interpretations.
- **Understandable:** indicators should be unambiguous, easy to understand by decision-makers and key stakeholders, and be standardised where possible.

An effective framework will minimise the number of core indicators to support decision-making by avoiding unnecessary complexity.

Source: OECD (2011), 'Compendium of OECD Well-being indicators'; Civitas (2020), 'CIVITAS 2020 process and impact evaluation framework'



## Australian Centre on Quality of Life

About us

ACQol Membership

Publications

Instruments/Resources

Data Portal

Collaborators/Projects

For Media

Sustainability

- <https://www.acqol.com.au/>
- Highly reliable and validated brief measure
- An incredibly rich resource – 22 years of comparable data
- Data that are publicly available and ready for use

# Future offerings...

- Interactive data portal to allow users to play with the data online
- Online data dictionary to help data users
- Improving our understanding of the National Wellbeing Index
- More data to track changes overtime...

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[Published: November 2003](#)

## Developing a National Index of Subjective Wellbeing: The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

[Robert A. Cummins](#) , [Richard Eckersley](#), [Julie Pallant](#), [Jackie van Vugt](#) & [RoseAnne Misajon](#)

[Social Indicators Research](#) **64**, 159–190 (2003) | [Cite this article](#)

*‘The index is, potentially, a complementary indicator of national performance and progress to the dominant economic measures.’*

# Acknowledgements



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Jeremy  
Little



Billy  
Falkingham



Mallery  
Crowe

Extra slides for question time

# The National Wellbeing Index

How satisfied are you with you----- in Australia ?

