

FAQs about Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life

1. What is Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life?

Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life is a summary measure that provides information on how well older people aged 60 and over in the UK are doing in life. It provides an average wellbeing score of between 0 and 100, with 100 being the highest score representing the greatest level of wellbeing. It provides this information overall and for each of the five individual domains (see Figure 3 of our summary report, available at www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeingresearch).

2. What does it tell us?

The Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life tells us:

- what is important to older people's wellbeing (there are 40 indicators) and which of these is more or less important (with participation being the largest contribution to the wellbeing score, see Figure 1 in the summary report, available at www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeingresearch)
- that the average wellbeing score for older people in the UK as of 2016 was 53 per cent, which means that overall older people's wellbeing is just slightly above half-way between the worst possible score and the best possible score
- that wellbeing is affected by all aspects of people's lives (see Figure 2 in the summary report)
- that there are clear reasons as to why older people have low levels wellbeing compared to those experiencing high levels of wellbeing.

3. Why did we choose 60+ as the age cut-off?

We wanted to capture the wellbeing of individuals before and after State Pension Age. In the future, this will allow us to undertake analysis of the wellbeing of individuals over time as they move into retirement. We also wanted to be able to explore the effects of employment on wellbeing, and individuals aged 60 to 64 are more likely to be employed than those aged 65+.

4. How did you select the 40 indicators?

We identified over 100 factors that are thought to affect wellbeing from research articles and our consultations (see our [methodology summary](#) if you'd like to know more about the research sources and who was on the research team). We then looked to see which of the available data sources asked questions that covered the largest number of these factors, and this turned out to be a survey called [Understanding Society](#). We then matched the factors to the questions asked in the survey, and 87 of them were covered. Some of these questions were grouped together to form 1 factor, such as 'mental wellbeing' which is formed from 12 questions. We then analysed these factors to see which ones significantly affected

wellbeing in people aged 60+, and the resulting 40 we have called 'indicators', because they indicate whether or not someone has a high level of wellbeing.

Not all the factors were included in the construction of the final index because:

- A few turned out not to be statistically significantly related to wellbeing (such as having children aged 16 and under in the house, or whether you belong to a religion).
- A few did not have enough respondents required for the analysis (such as the ethnicity question where only 5% of the respondents aged 60 and over were non-white, or questions on sexual orientation and volunteering).
- As with any survey, Understanding Society did not ask every question we would like to know about (such as questions about social care; however, social care questions will be added in future waves of Understanding Society surveys, so we will be able to factor this into the Index in the future).

A full report available later in 2017 will detail which of the over 100 identified indicators were included and excluded in the construction of the Index and reasons behind those excluded. In the meantime, you can find a list of the indicators which were included in our index and how Understanding Society asked about them at www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeingresearch .

5. What can it be used for?

The Index should help you understand what kinds of things to focus resources and efforts into to help achieve the largest improvement in the wellbeing of older people. For example it can help us see which groups of older people are most likely to experience low or high wellbeing, and what kinds of things we can do to help improve wellbeing amongst those who have low wellbeing. In the future, the Index will also be able to track average wellbeing over time.

6. Can I use it to evaluate wellbeing of older people who use my programme/service/etc.?

The Index is not an evaluation tool and cannot, at present, be used to measure the changes in an individual older person's wellbeing. It can however be used to understand the expected average impact on wellbeing from improvements in particular aspects (such as participation) that may occur due to a programme or service.

7. How much weight should we put on the Index?

The construction of Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life has been developed in consultation with:

- a panel of research experts selected for knowledge about older people and wellbeing,

- sounding boards and panels of older people who scrutinise Age UK's work and have expertise in many areas,
- focus groups of older people, and
- Age UK colleagues who are experts in various policy and service areas.

A lay-reader methodology is available at www.ageukorguk/wellbeingresearch. The methodology will also be peer reviewed which will go some way to validating our measure of wellbeing.

8. What are the future plans for the Index of Wellbeing in Later Life?

In the next five years, depending on data availability, Age UK hopes to update the Index so that we can see what has happened to levels of wellbeing in the UK. We are also undertaking further research on groups with high and low wellbeing to get a better understanding of their lives, how they react to negative life events, and the role of local services in their wellbeing. And finally, we are exploring ways that we may be able to tailor the Index for local areas.