



The Mental Wealth Initiative: Systemic solutions for sustainable prosperity

The Challenge

Societies worldwide are entering a defining period in which prosperity will hinge on whether we can sustain the conditions that enable people to learn, work, care, connect, and contribute. Deteriorating youth mental health, workplace psychological injury, the loneliness epidemic, declining social cohesion, unsustainable health and social care systems, aging populations, and stalling economic productivity are not isolated challenges – they are system signals of deeper structural strain across our societies and economies.

Economic settings that prioritize GDP growth while eroding the social and environmental foundations that sustain it can undermine health and wellbeing, equity, trust, and community cohesion. Yet decision makers still lack actionable evidence and coherent investment strategies to strengthen the systems that foster brain health and enable resilience, innovation, and adaptability – capabilities that are essential for tackling current and future challenges under the compounding pressures of climate change and technological disruption.

Systemic problems require systemic solutions. Treating symptoms of structural strain through siloed interventions will continue to underperform unless we can identify – and shift – the underlying drivers shaping health, social cohesion, and sustainable prosperity.

Our Pioneering Approach

The University of Sydney's Mental Wealth Initiative is working to deliver systems-level, decision-relevant research to tackle complex societal challenges. We bring together expertise from population health, economics, business, public policy, and complex systems science to inform coordinated investments that build brain capital, cohesion, and sustainable wellbeing economies – including through disruptive transitions such as generative AI.

We do this by broadening what decision makers can see and value, and by building an investment case for the non-market foundations of prosperity. The Mental Wealth framework extends beyond GDP to recognize the economic and societal value created through **social production** – the unpaid contributions and relational infrastructure that enable people to care, connect, participate, and contribute. By making these foundations of prosperity explicit and measurable, we equip governments, multilaterals, foundations, and industry to design policies and investments that strengthen resilience, reduce avoidable downstream costs, and support healthier, more productive lives.

Our Research Streams

Youth Mental Wellbeing: Rather than treating youth mental health as a siloed health issue, we examine how social and economic environments characterized by financial insecurity, status-based hyper-competition, parental stress, overburdened educators, and declining social cohesion are driving psychological distress among young people. Global threats such as climate change and generative AI-labour market disruption further compound these challenges, casting doubt on the fulfillment of young people's aspirations. Our research is working to identify specific economic and social investments that will help rebuild environments where young people can thrive.

Healthy Longevity: We're reframing older adults as valuable contributors to social production (worth billions annually in many economies) rather than an economic burden. The engagement of older adults in social production activities profoundly enhances their quality of life and mental health, while reducing



functional decline and mortality risk. By fostering opportunities for meaningful contribution, we directly address the public health concerns of loneliness and social isolation. This strengthens mental health and functional capacity, reduces demand for formal care and avoidable health-system costs, and supports communities through the transmission of knowledge, wisdom, and cultural heritage. Our research quantifies the health, social, fiscal, and economic returns of enabling social production in later life, including the intergenerational dividends for health and wellbeing, care-system sustainability, and community cohesion.

Socially sustainable workplaces: We combine workplace redesign for social sustainability with measurement of organizational social production to enable a more sustainable productivity pathway – shifting from marginal efficiency gains extracted through intensification to durable performance built on psychological safety, job quality, capability, and social value creation. Our Social Production Quotient then makes visible how organizations contribute to social stability and prosperity through participation pathways and community partnerships. By making this contribution visible, organizations can target investments that reduce disruption that strengthen legitimacy and long-term resilience, while minimizing disruption during periods of change.

Societal resilience in the Age of Intelligence: We lead an integrated program on the societal impacts of generative AI and the conditions for a stable transition that strengthens, rather than erodes, the Mental Wealth of nations. Our work examines: (i) macroeconomic risks, (ii) labor market transformation and job quality, and (iii) the material infrastructure of AI – such as data centers and their energy consumption – and how this can be aligned with renewable energy integration and grid stability. We translate this evidence into policy and planning roadmaps to help governments and organizations capture productivity gains while protecting equity, wellbeing, and social stability.

Our Impact

The Mental Wealth Initiative is creating transformation at multiple levels:

- **Policy Impact:** Our research informs integrated policy and investment decisions that balance economic and social prosperity, reducing the unintended consequences of siloed approaches.
- **Measurement Innovation:** We provide regular, comparable reporting on Mental Wealth and social production, offering insights that extend beyond traditional economic indicators and support accountability and prioritization across sectors.
- **Community Resilience:** We help decision makers align economic, social, and health levers to strengthen community resilience through coordinated, evidence-informed investment—building social stability and long-term prosperity and reducing disruption through change.

Why Partner With Us

The Mental Wealth Initiative, led by A/Professor Jo-An Occhipinti (Sydney School of Public Health) and Professor John Buchanan (Business School and the Brain and Mind Centre), offers partners the opportunity to back a field-defining research capability that aims to strengthening the social conditions that keep people healthy, economies productive, and communities cohesive.

Your support would accelerate our work to redefine what progress looks like - and what gets rewarded – so societies can rebuild the foundations of stability in an era of accelerating disruption. In a world that feels increasingly fragile and in decline, this initiative offers a fundamentally different way forward: it creates the systemic evidence, measures, and decision tools to make the hidden drivers of resilience governable, so leaders can address root causes rather than manage consequences. Together, we can pioneer a more balanced and sustainable model of prosperity.