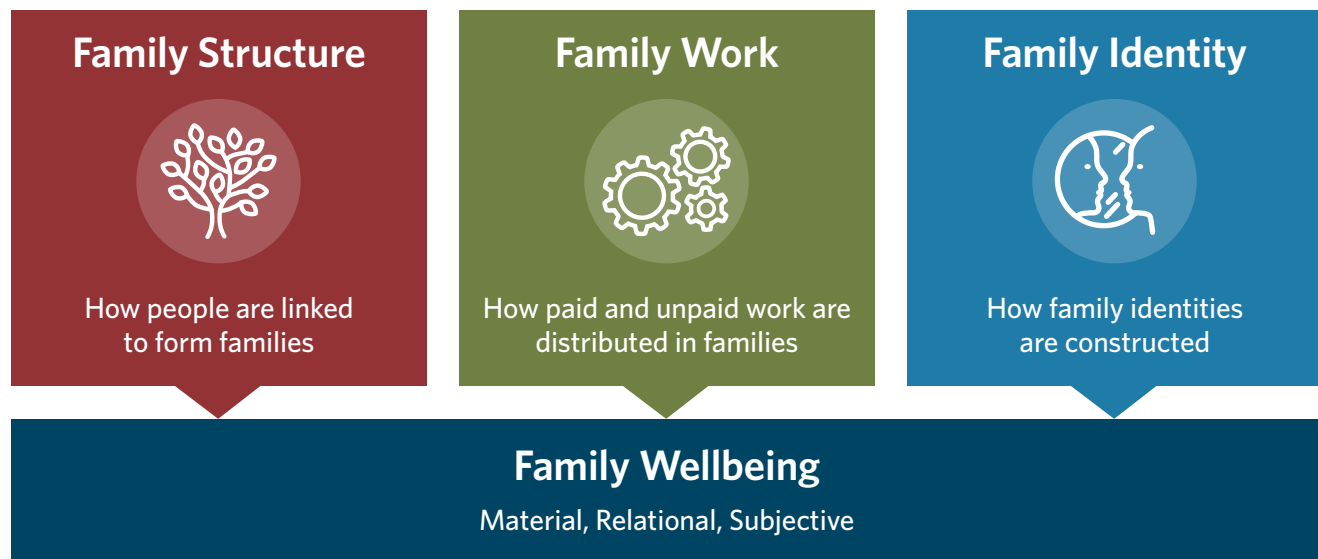


Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework

While our [definition of family](#) sets a wide and inclusive scope for our work, our focus and analyses are guided by the Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework.



Why family diversities?

Many of our contemporary conversations about families in Canada are about how they have changed in ways that make them more diverse. There is much to celebrate in these diversities and in the family mosaic that they create. Yet we also see that while some families are thriving, others are marginalized.

To date, we have not had a way of systematically thinking about family diversities or about the inequalities that may be inherent in them. Across the variety of families in Canada, it is important to map what is known, where knowledge gaps exist, and where we need to create evidence that can inform policies, programs, and services to better support family wellbeing.

A roadmap for understanding family diversity

Developed by the Vanier Institute of the Family¹ through consultation with academic and government partners and grounded in family research, the Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework views family diversity through three lenses: **Family Structure**, **Family Work**, and **Family Identity**. Each lens focuses on a different way of seeing families. Each illuminates factors that can either enhance or detract from family wellbeing. Each provides a way of highlighting where our understanding is currently limited.

Below, we outline what each lens means, why it matters, and priority areas for consideration based on current issues in Canadian society.



Family Structure

How people are linked to form families

The Family Structure lens focuses on how people are connected in families through their relationships.

The ways families are structured reflect societal values and influence legislation around union formation and dissolution, childbearing, child care, and the economic and social responsibilities family members have with each other.

This lens motivates us to examine how families affect, and are affected by, laws and policies related to the shape of families and family life.

Examples:

- Intimate partner structures
- Parental structures
- Multigenerational structures
- Structurally diverse families



Family Work

How paid and unpaid work are distributed in families

The Family Work lens focuses on patterns of paid and unpaid work within families.

The division of work among family members shapes their opportunities for workforce participation and access to benefits such as pensions, parental benefits, and caregiver leaves. The ways in which work is distributed within families provides insights into how paid and unpaid work are valued and supported.

This lens motivates us to examine how public and workplace policies hinder, support, or otherwise shape diverse work arrangements and the different impacts these arrangements have on families and family life.

Examples:

- Care work
- Household labour
- High-risk work
- Precarious work
- Work requiring periods of absence



Family Identity

How family identities are constructed

The Family Identity lens focuses on how families view themselves and how they are perceived and represented by others.

Family identities can create a sense of belonging to a larger community with which families share common features and experiences. Yet, these identities may also be imposed on families in ways that create stigma and lead to marginalization and exclusion.

Some of these identities are represented in the family habits, rituals, traditions, and characteristics that bind people together.

Examples:

- Immigrant families
- Indigenous families
- LGBTQ2S+ families
- Racialized families

Family Wellbeing

Material, relational, subjective

Guided by earlier research on the wellbeing of individuals and groups,² we view family wellbeing as having three dimensions: material (what people have), relational (their social connections), and subjective (their sense of the fit between their aspirations and goals and their experiences).

Material wellbeing: what people have

Material wellbeing is the resources that families have, such as adequate food, shelter, and income. It can also include other resources used to address health care, wellbeing, and other necessary expenditures.

Examples:

- Income and wealth
- Family health
- Housing
- Food security
- Education

Relational wellbeing: social connections

Relational wellbeing is a sense of satisfaction with the social relationships people have that provide them with support and feelings of connection and belonging.

Examples:

- Satisfaction with family relationships
- Satisfaction with time spent with family
- Sense of community belonging
- Physical and psychological safety

Subjective wellbeing: alignment of family goals and experiences

Subjective wellbeing is the sense of fit between the goals and aspirations of families and their experiences. It also includes how people perceive their family is functioning when compared with others.

Examples:

- Satisfaction with family life as a whole
- Satisfaction with family life in comparison with other families

Suggested citation for the Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework:

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¹ This framework was developed by Kim de Laat, PhD; Norah Keating, PhD; and Margo Hilbrecht, PhD, of the Vanier Institute of the Family in consultation with Vanier Institute partners.

² McGregor, J. A., & Pouw, N. (2017). Towards an economics of well-being. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 41(4), 1123-1142. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bew044>