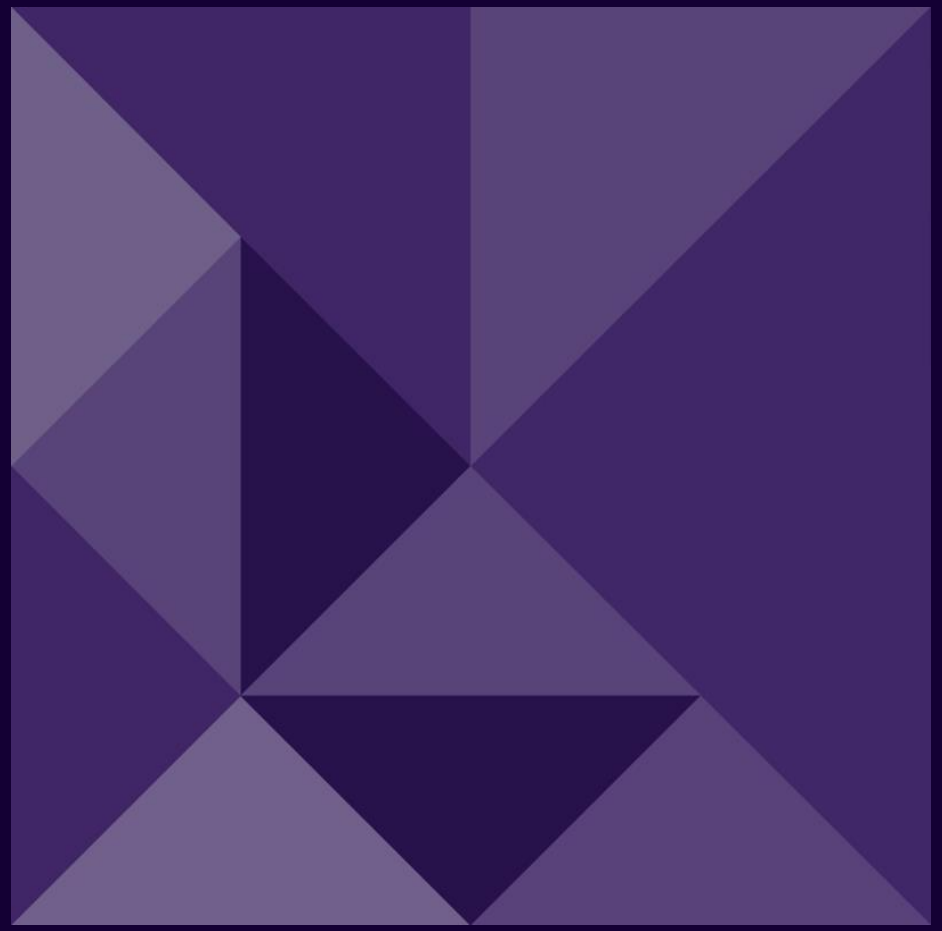
September 2025

Meaning and money

Bringing evaluation and economics together



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Acknowledgement of Country

ACIL Allen – Who are we?

ACIL Allen is a leading independent economics, policy and strategy advisory firm, dedicated to helping clients solve complex issues.

ACIL Allen came to life because of our belief in the power of good economic, policy and strategy advice. Since then, we've been on a mission to solve our clients' complex economic and public policy issues.

We're a team of people who value genuine insight and are passionate about making the world a better place.

Amy Mehrton is the Executive Director of the Melbourne office at ACIL Allen, where she leads a diverse portfolio of complex social policy projects. Her work focuses on tackling challenging social issues through rigorous research, evaluation, and strategy development, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable communities and systemic change.

Matt Seymour is a Senior Consultant who leads economic assessments across a diverse range of industries for both government and non-government clients. His work emphasises wellbeing, social cohesion, the environment, and the arts. Matt delivers in-depth economic assessments by spearheading the application of innovative economic valuation methodologies.

This presentation – Why are we here today?

Explain the different philosophies that underpin evaluation and economics

Provide a deeper dive in principles of economic analysis

Introduce a case study on integrated practice

Share lessons learned on how to best bring evaluation and economics together

Evaluation and economics – Why does it matter?

EVALUATION

- Informs decisions about whether to continue, improve, or discontinue strategies, policies and programs
- Provides insights into what works for whom, in what contexts
- Embeds person-centred, user-led approaches and the voice of lived and living experience
- Can range from micro (individual) to macro (strategic) experiences

Together provide insights that benefit multiple audiences – primary clients, community and treasury

Increasingly important as the fiscal environment becomes tighter

Provides more valid, credible and targeted evidence for the continuation or change of existing initiatives

ECONOMICS

- Supports decision-making on resource investment and prioritisation across interventions
- Provides insights into resource costs and trade-offs between interventions
- Focuses on maximising consumer and producer welfare, often measured using prices
- Builds individual outcomes into an aggregate intervention assessment

Case study – What were we doing?

Evaluation of a state-based intervention program that aimed to protect community safety by providing supports to people at risk of causing significant harm

Involved:

- **Qualitative research** – consultation with program staff and delivery partners, a literature review and document analysis
- **Quantitative research** – whole-of-government data linkage, alongside program data, to explore outcomes across the service system

World-first CBA that aimed to quantify the benefits of preventative efforts in avoiding costs to justice system, mental health services and economic disruption

Common challenges – What made it hard?

Conceptual

- Different frames, philosophies and methods
- Different priorities and ways of considering impacts

Technical

- Appropriateness of standard tools for both purposes
- Attribution of change that flows causally from an intervention
- Valuing changes in evidence-light environments

Narrative

- Integrating 2 perspectives – human-centred vs economically-oriented
- Language is inherently different

Effective solutions – What did we do to solve it?

Shared understanding

Expanded outcomes logic to reflect economic benefits (step beyond long-term outcomes)

Outcomes	Economic benefits	Indicators for valuation
Increased resilience	Improved wellbeing	Improved self-reported satisfaction score
Improved mental health	Improved mental health	Improved results on mental health screening tools
	No change needed	
Improved public safety	Fewer violent incidents	Avoided costs from incident response

Effective solutions – What did we do to solve it?

Integrated data strategy

Recognising that the data is similar, but CBA adds an extra step

		Can be collected *using normal eval tools*		Already captured *through typical data collection*		Must be identified *through literature*
NET BENEFIT	=	**Δ OUTCOME**	×	**PARTICIPANTS**	×	**VALUE**
Improved happiness and wellbeing	=	Δ self-reported wellbeing score	×	Participants	×	Value of self-reported wellbeing
Improved mental health	=	Δ mental health assessment result	×	Participants	×	Value of self-reported mental health
Improved public safety	=	Δ incidents	×	Participants	×	Cost of incidents

Effective solutions – What did we do to solve it?

Creativity in valuation

Focusing on the value of the outcome and build out an approach that can add value when data are absent

What we measure now

Improved wellbeing → More social capital →

What was measured before

More income, fewer hospital visits

What we measure now

Improved mental health → Fewer episodes →

What was measured before

Fewer hospital visits

What we measure now

Avoided incidents →

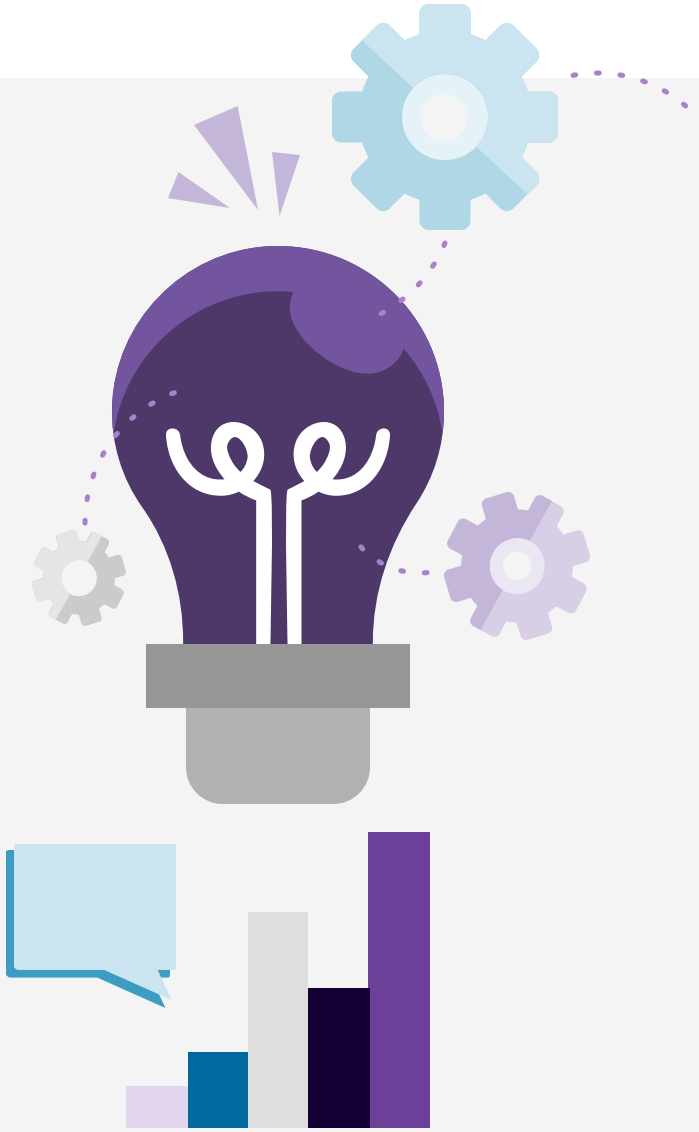
Avoided police costs + Avoided harm and damage

Take home messages – What should you ask yourself?

01 How can you build the multidisciplinary approach early, bringing the team along?

02 How can you ensure the quality of data is sufficient to support economic analysis?

03 How do you enhance client communication and capacity building to engage with economic valuation?



For more information

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