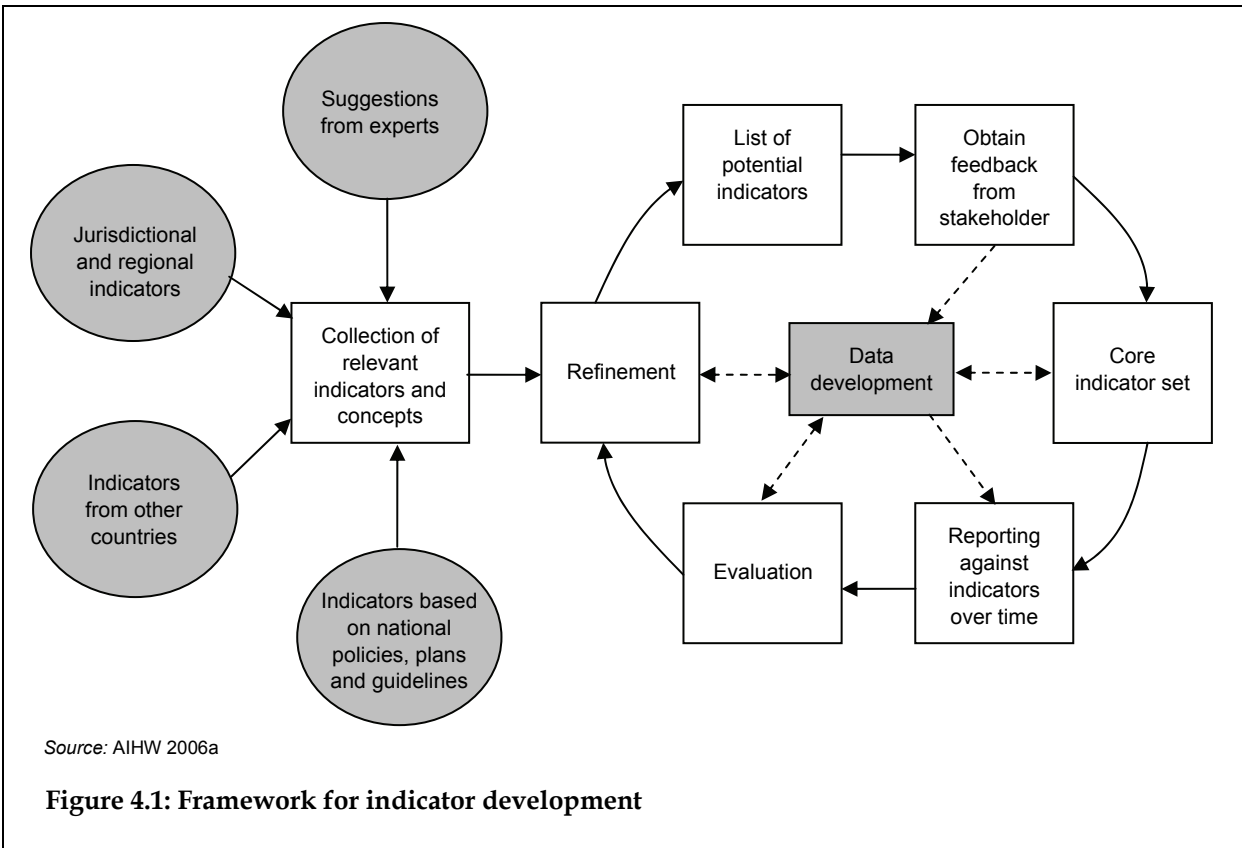


# 4 Considerations for future indicator development

The use of indicators is central to monitoring eye health within Australia. Performance indicators are a valuable tool to identify trends, inform decision making and policy and evaluate the implementation of various interventions. Indicators have several levels of relevance. Assessments can be made at regional levels, through to national and international comparisons.

The AIHW has a history of involvement in the development of national performance indicators for many health areas. The typical process for indicator development is an iterative one, as illustrated by Figure 4.1.



Based on the process used to develop national indicators for monitoring osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis, indicator development begins with the identification of potential indicators. These are gathered from a number of sources, including existing indicators used regionally or internationally, those that flow from policy, and through consultations with experts. There are several areas from which to source potential indicators within the area of eye health. The WHO has developed a framework and indicators for monitoring VISION 2020 – The Right

to Sight (WHO 2003). Countries are encouraged to employ indicators from the basic set that are the most appropriate for their epidemiological and disease pattern and intervention strategy.

A number of potential indicators were suggested through the consultation process for the development of the *National eye health framework*. These may be used as a catalyst for further development through the formal channels of stakeholder consultation or through a national expert workshop. Potential indicators can also flow from the key areas of action expressed in the *National eye health framework*.

The next step in the indicator development process is to assess and refine the list of potential indicators. The National Health Performance Committee (NHPC) was established by the Australian Health Ministers' Conference and is attended by representatives from each state and territory, the Australian Government and national bodies. The NHPC is responsible for the development and maintenance of a national health performance framework, the support of benchmarking for health system improvement and the provision of information on national health system performance (NHPC 2004). The NHPC's criteria for indicator development (Box 1) may be used as a tool to assess the utility of potential indicators.

The NHPC's National Health Performance Framework aims to facilitate the use of data for benchmarking purposes. The list of potential indicators may also be organised within the tiers of the NHPC's National Health Performance Framework (NHPC 2001). The three tiers are health status and outcomes, determinants of health and health system performance. By organising indicators within the National Health Performance Framework a whole of system approach can be taken to developing indicators and measuring eye health.

**Box 1: Selection criteria for health performance indicators**

*Indicators should have all or some of the following qualities. They should:*

1. *be worth measuring*
2. *be measurable for diverse populations*
3. *be understood by people who need to act*
4. *galvanise action*
5. *be relevant to policy and practice*
6. *measurement over time will reflect results of actions*
7. *be feasible to collect and report*
8. *comply with national processes of data definitions.*

Source: NHPC 2001.

The NHPC recommends that indicators should have some or all of the qualities outlined in the selection criteria for sets of performance indicators (Box 2).

Following the assessment and refinement of indicators, feedback may be sought from experts and stakeholders. Any further short-listing of indicators should take this input into consideration.

**Box 2: Selection criteria for sets of performance indicators**

*Sets of indicators or composite indices should:*

1. *cover the spectrum of the health issue*
2. *reflect a balance of indicators for all appropriate parts of the framework*
3. *identify and respond to new and emerging issues*
4. *be capable of leading change*
5. *provide feedback on where the system is working well, as well as areas for improvement.*

*Source: National Health Performance Committee 2001.*

Further to the criteria outlined above, the NHPC recommends that indicators should be specified in technical terms to ensure consistency of reporting. The committee also recommends that indicators should conform with existing data definitions.

Therefore, to support the short-listed indicators, formalised definitions are required where existing data definitions do not exist. Again, this development stage is perhaps best done through a consultation process. If necessary, the indicators may be refined at a later stage to meet future information needs and priorities.

It is also important to seek the agreement of stakeholders on the nature and form of indicators to ensure wide acceptance.