

# Opening the Gates to Wellness

## A perspective on inclusive wellbeing for women of colour

By Ruhee Meghani

According to a new report from the Global Wellness Institute, wellness is a big, global business with approx. \$5.6 trillion in revenue in 2022.

Over the years, and more rapidly during and post pandemic, there has been a big push for conversation and action surrounding wellbeing. Unfortunately, a lot of the discussions tend to forget about intersectionality and experiences of women of colour. For us, wellbeing is not just about our own physical health, but also about the cultural, social, spiritual, and systemic challenges we face.

The legacy of colonisation has had a lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of women of colour. It has affected global systems & ideologies such as body image, beauty standards, access to healthcare, and financial stability. Recognizing this context is important in order to effectively address the specific challenges that women of colour face when it comes to overall wellness.

The idea of inclusive wellbeing talks about wellbeing that everyone deserves to have, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, or cultural backgrounds, ensuring that health and wellness are accessible and relevant for all individuals in a diverse society. By looking at wellbeing from all angles, like the ten (10) Dimensions of Wellbeing, we can better understand and meet the diverse needs of almost everyone.

### Understanding the 10 Dimensions of Wellbeing

The 10 Dimensions of Wellbeing is a comprehensive framework developed by Allied Collective that encompasses Physical, Social, Environmental, Spiritual, Intersectional, Occupational, Digital, Financial, Emotional, and Mental wellbeing. In this context, each dimension presents specific challenges and nuances for women of colour:

- 1. Physical Wellbeing:** Access to healthcare and culturally competent medical advice is of significant concern. It is crucial to have healthcare systems that truly understand and respect diverse bodies and health histories.
- 2. Social Wellbeing:** Women of colour often navigate complex social dynamics, balancing multiple cultural expectations while experiencing a sense of otherness in multiple intersecting spaces.

3. **Environmental Wellbeing:** Environmental racism means that women of colour are more likely to reside in areas with poor air quality, limited access to green spaces, and greater exposure to environmental hazards.
4. **Spiritual Wellbeing:** Spirituality can be a strong source of strength and thus wellbeing, yet it is often undervalued in discussions about wellness. The diverse spiritual practices of women of colour deserve recognition and appreciation.
5. **Intersectional Wellbeing:** Intersectionality underscores how ethnicity, gender, class, and other identities intersect and impact wellbeing. Women of colour face unique challenges at this intersection, often dealing with both racism, sexism, and relatively low economic social status.
6. **Occupational Wellbeing:** Workplace discrimination and the underrepresentation in leadership roles can have a significant impact on the occupational wellbeing of women of colour.
7. **Digital Wellbeing:** In the digital realm, women of colour frequently encounter online harassment and the burden of representing their culture, which can be mentally and emotionally exhausting.
8. **Financial Wellbeing:** Systemic barriers often affect the financial stability of women of colour, making financial wellbeing a crucial and yet challenging aspect to address. Women on lower income are less likely to afford a high quality of health insurance and thus good quality of medical health care.
9. **Emotional Wellbeing:** The emotional burden of coping with everyday racism and sexism can take a toll, highlighting the need for safe spaces that encourage emotional expression and support.
10. **Mental Wellbeing:** Mental health stigma, combined with a lack of culturally sensitive mental health resources, can impede the mental wellbeing of women of colour. It is important to address these issues and provide appropriate support.

### **Some examples how inequities in wellbeing shows up in the world today:**

#### **Exclusion in Yoga, Health, and Beauty Standards Yoga**

A practice with its roots in South Asian cultures, has been widely appropriated in the Western world, often promotes thin, able, and euro-centric bodies. This not only erases its cultural origins but also promotes a narrow and exclusive idea of who can participate in wellness practices. Similarly, mainstream beauty standards are heavily influenced by a colonial mindset, and often tend to marginalise and devalue the diverse beauty of women of colour.

## **Structural and Institutional Racism in Healthcare**

The healthcare system is not immune to the effects of colonisation and systemic racism. Women of colour often face biases in medical treatment and a lack of culturally competent care. This disparity is evident in areas such as mental health, where women of colour are less likely to receive accurate diagnoses or have access to culturally sensitive therapists. Furthermore, historical medical abuses against women of colour have contributed to a deep mistrust in the healthcare system, making them less likely to seek needed care.

## **Financial Wellbeing Affected by Systemic Inequities**

Economic disparities rooted in colonisation and systemic racism significantly impact the financial wellbeing of women of colour. They often face wage gaps, employment discrimination, and limited access to economic resources, which in turn affects their ability to seek quality healthcare, invest in wellness practices, and attain financial stability. These financial challenges are not just individual struggles; they are the result of deeply entrenched systemic inequities.

## **The Way Forward: Acknowledging and Addressing the Impact**

Recognizing and addressing these issues is essential in the journey towards inclusive wellbeing. It involves:

- Building partnerships with government, private and non-government health, and allied health organisations to work collaboratively with women of colour to co-design health policy that reflects the social, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of women of colour.
- Advocating for and promoting diversity and inclusivity in healthcare, both in representation and in practice.
- Working towards systemic change to bridge the financial and healthcare gaps experienced by women of colour.
- Cultivating safe and affirming spaces where women of colour can explore wellness in a way that is respectful and reflective of their cultural and individual identities.

The impact of colonisation and systemic racism on the health and wellbeing of women of colour is significant and cannot be overlooked. The path to healing and wellbeing is intertwined with the larger fight for access, equity, and justice, requiring collective and concerted efforts to create a more multi-dimensional, inclusive, diverse, and compassionate world.

## **The Gap in Mainstream Wellbeing Conversations**

Mainstream wellbeing narratives often overlook the diverse and complex experiences of individuals. It is important to recognize that wellness advice that does not take into account cultural, spiritual, social, and systemic factors is likely to be fragmented and ineffective for women of colour. That is

why there is a growing need for a wellbeing approach that is both inclusive and responsive to these unique experiences.

Acknowledging these gaps, Allied Collective offers wellbeing and leadership coaching services that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of all women and those who identify as women. Our approach recognizes and addresses the distinct challenges faced by women of colour, ensuring that our coaching is not only inclusive but also empowering.

Our coaching programs encompass the 10 Dimensions of Wellbeing, providing tools and strategies that are culturally sensitive, intersectional, and responsive to the specific needs of our clients. We firmly believe in empowering women to lead with confidence, resilience, and a holistic understanding of their wellbeing.

At Allied Collective, we are dedicated to reshaping the wellbeing conversation to include all voices, especially those that have historically been marginalised and are still vulnerable. Our mission is to create a supportive, nurturing space where every woman can find the support, growth, and empowerment they deserve.

As a seasoned facilitator and accomplished public speaker, Ruhee has over twelve (12) years of experience across a diverse range of industries including advertising, sport retail, hospitality, technology, digital marketing, community services, and wellbeing.

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**About Ruhee Meghani**, lead facilitator & founder of Allied Collective Forever curious, straight-talking, and driven by conversation around inclusion and equity, Ruhee holds a strong background and extensive experience of over 12 years in psychology, Yoga philosophy and business management. Ruhee's diverse skill set, and experience has driven her to found Allied Collective, Australia's first inclusive facilitation & wellbeing agency. For more information on our services and how we can support your wellbeing and leadership journey, please visit [www.alliedcollective.com.au](http://www.alliedcollective.com.au) or email [info@alliedcollective.com.au](mailto:info@alliedcollective.com.au)