



Student Mental Health And Wellbeing Strategy

2023 -2025



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Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of our lands and waterways. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Deakin campuses are built on the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung people of the Geelong region, the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the greater Melbourne region, and the Gunditjmarra people of Western Victoria. We welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to Deakin. Deakin is committed to valuing, building and sustaining recognition, understanding and positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians.

Nathan PATTERSON Learning Together, Growing Together Commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Innovation Image reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Foreword by Vice Chancellor

Mental health and wellbeing affect all aspects of university life – it gives students the resilience and motivation they need to engage effectively in complex learning tasks, manage difficult stressors, respond to the challenges, and make the most of the opportunities their university course provides.

In developing this Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 - 2025, Deakin is committed to improving student mental health through a focus on prevention, response and continuous improvement. The wellbeing of our students is a Deakin-wide responsibility, and a student-centred approach is paramount. The increased prevalence of mental health concerns and the stresses and restrictions associated with COVID-19 shine a spotlight on the importance of this strategy.

Deakin first launched a Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2019, and achievements since then include:

- consulting with students to ensure our online mental health resources are accessible, relevant, culturally appropriate and inclusive
- improving access to culturally safe and responsible counselling services for student cohorts with known specific mental health and wellbeing needs through a Social and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellor to support First Nation students and an embedded counsellor within the School of Nursing and Midwifery
- introducing new programs to improve awareness of mental health issues, decrease stigmatisation and encourage students to seek help (e.g., the Mind Matters Students' Artwork exhibition, University Mental Health Day, Men's Health and RUOK Day for students).
- expanding our mental health literacy training for staff with the introduction of the Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training and ongoing delivery of Mental Health First Aid programs.

We know that we have more work to do, and this strategy outlines our focus for the next three years.



We will continue to work collaboratively to understand and minimize the factors which heighten the risk of mental ill-health, and ensure our mental health strategies are planned, implemented, evaluated and that outcomes are shared.

Professor Iain Martin Deakin University Vice-Chancellor.

Executive Sponsors: *The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is a critical strategy across both teaching and the student experience and is endorsed by our executive sponsors: Professor Liz Johnson, Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic and Kerrie Parker, Executive Vice President Resources.*

Acknowledgements: *this Strategy draws on expert knowledge from students and staff across the University. We extend our thanks to members of the Executive Leadership Group, Action Leads, Student Advisory Group and other stakeholders who have guided the development of this Strategy.*



Vision

Our vision is that Deakin will be an inclusive and supportive university community, with an evidence-based and coordinated approach to fostering positive mental health and wellbeing.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health matters; it affects health, social, education and employment outcomes at both an individual and community level. Universities have a key role to play in shaping and supporting student mental health and wellbeing. A safe, positive and respectful university environment can support students to remain engaged with learning, contribute to the broader public good and create scope for change by producing graduates ready to lead and contribute to mentally healthy workplaces and communities.

There is also evidence that investment in mental health prevention programs provides economic benefit for the broader community. The Australian Productivity Commission's 2020 report concluded that taking into account its impact on work, health and life expectancy, mental ill-health represents a \$220 billion cost to the Australian economy annually. Within the university sector, research from the US suggests that for every \$1 universities spend on preventive mental health programs for students there is a saving of over \$6 in health-care costs and waste from non-completion of courses.

COVID-19 has also brought unprecedented disruption and significant challenges in relation to mental health, particularly for young people who faced such challenges during a critical and transitional time in their lives.

In a survey conducted by Orygen and Mission Australia in 2021, 62.3% of respondents indicated that their education was negatively impacted by COVID-19 and over half (50.3%) of all respondents reported that their mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic. Impacts included loss of employment and income, social isolation due to lockdowns and social distancing, increased stress, poor study environments, and uncertainty, fear and worry. The pandemic is also expected to have a lasting legacy, exacerbating rates of anxiety, depression and mental ill-health, resulting in increasing numbers of young people struggling at university.

References:

1. Orygen Youth Mental Health, Australian University Student Mental Health Framework, 2020
2. Australian Productivity Commission, [Inquiry Report - Mental Health Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\), 2020](https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/mental-health)
3. Ashwood, J. S., Stein, B. D., Briscoombe, B., Sontag-Padilla, L. M., Woodbridge, M. W., May, E., Seelam, R., & Burnam, M. A. (2015). [Payoffs for California College Students and Taxpayers from Investing in Student Mental Health](#). In Payoffs for California College Students and Tax payers from Investing in Student Mental Health (pp. 1–12). RAND Corporation.
4. Mission Australia and Orygen, [Clusters of COVID Impact: Identifying the Impact of COVID-19 on Young Australians in 2021, 2021](#)

Prevention



Work collaboratively to understand and minimise factors which heighten risk of mental ill-health; enhance factors which support mental health and wellbeing, and build the capacity of students to identify, seek support and recover from mental health issues or mental ill-health.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Implement mental health and wellbeing approaches that are informed by student needs, perspectives and the reality of lived experience.

Create an environment that both enhances and promotes student mental health and wellbeing.

Foster a mentally healthy university community which encourages participation; a diverse, inclusive environment; promotes connectedness; and supports academic, professional and personal achievement.

KEY ACTIONS

- Recognise and work to address university specific risk factors that contribute to student's experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing.
- Address mental health stigmatisation and promote help-seeking behaviours through peer-led initiatives
- Increase mental health literacy within the student community
- Review and enhance the safety and inclusiveness of physical and online spaces.
- Engage students in activities which promote inclusion and belonging with Deakin.
- Engage students undertaking leadership roles in training and capacity building programs
- Ensure curriculum design and best practice teaching strategies promote inclusive learning and teaching environments which support and enhance student mental health and wellbeing.

Response



Ensure a coordinated and connected response to students who are experiencing issues with their mental health, remove barriers to seeking and receiving support, manage crises and provide referral.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Strengthen our response to mental health issues and strengthen mental wellbeing through collaboration and coordinated actions.

Ensure students can access appropriate, timely and effective referrals to specialised services.

KEY ACTIONS

- Ensure an appropriate, timely coordinated, and compassionate response to student wellbeing.
- Explore development of collaborative partnerships.
- Monitor demand and students' timely access to university support and referral services.
- Enhance awareness of university services and support.

Continuous Improvement



Obtain and effectively use available information, data and feedback to guide and inform Deakin's future actions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Use accurate and recent evidence to improve and strengthen initiatives that support student mental health and wellbeing.

KEY ACTIONS

- Source and employ relevant service-delivery data relating to mental health.
- Source feedback regarding mental health initiatives.
- Identify and incorporate institutional, national and international research, data and recommendations relating to best practice in mental health.

ENABLERS



CULTURE



ENVIRONMENT



PARTNERSHIPS



EVIDENCE

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing at Deakin

The *Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2025* (the Strategy) builds upon the program of work undertaken since 2019. It addresses three key priorities – prevention, response and continuous improvement, and is based upon six guiding principles adapted from the Orygen [Australian University Mental Health Framework](#) (2020).

Prevention



Response



Continuous Improvement



Guiding principles:

1. Implement mental health and wellbeing approaches that are informed by student needs, perspectives and the reality of lived experience
2. Create an environment that both enhances and promotes student mental health and wellbeing
3. Foster a mentally healthy university community which encourages participation; a diverse, inclusive environment; promotes connectedness; and supports academic, professional and personal achievement
4. Strengthen our response to mental health issues and strengthen mental wellbeing through collaboration and coordinated actions
5. Ensure students can access appropriate, timely and effective referrals to specialised services
6. Use accurate and recent evidence to improve and strengthen initiatives that support student mental health and wellbeing

The Strategy will be implemented through an Action Plan which sets out targeted initiatives. While the principles contained in the Strategy will continue to guide initiatives over the life of the Strategy, an annual Action Plan will ensure it responds to the fast-changing external environment and that Deakin's approach to supporting student's mental health wellbeing is informed by emerging best practice.

Enablers:



CULTURE

University leaders who set the tone and influence of a whole of institutional commitment to student mental health and wellbeing.



ENVIRONMENT

Safe, respectful and inclusive physical and online environment.



PARTNERSHIPS

Strong internal and external engagement, collaboration and partnerships.



EVIDENCE

A commitment to continuous learning, improvement and innovation through data collection, evaluation and research.



Roles and Responsibilities

Mental health and wellbeing is a shared responsibility and whilst universities have a role to play in supporting the wellbeing of students, addressing the issue of mental ill-health is not something which universities can do alone.

Deakin is responsible for:

- promoting a culture that fosters safe, respectful and inclusive behaviours and supports student mental health and wellbeing,
- creating a learning environment that supports good mental health, with student wellbeing integral to curriculum and assessment design,
- providing training and professional development to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and encouraging engagement and participation,
- recognising the role of students in the design, delivery and evaluation of health and wellbeing programs and initiatives,
- empowering students to develop the insight, understanding and skills to manage and maintain their own wellbeing, and fostering strong partnerships with external services to ensure that students experiencing mental ill-health have access to appropriate specialist support,
- developing and implementing a robust evaluation framework to inform continuous improvement.

All members of the Deakin University community are responsible for:

- contributing to a mentally healthy University culture,
- taking reasonable care of their own mental health and wellbeing, seeking support when required,
- taking reasonable care that their actions do not have a negative impact on the wellbeing of other staff and students,
- being aware of their [rights and responsibilities](#) as a Deakin student and/or staff member.

Deakin University staff are responsible for:

- ensuring they are familiar with Deakin's Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and actively support its implementation,
- accessing appropriate and ongoing training in relation to mental ill-health where this is relevant to their role,
- ensuring they are aware of and promote access to available support and services within Deakin and the broader community.

Deakin's Student Mental Health Strategy and annual Action Plans contribute to Deakin's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), specifically in relation to [SDG 3](#) to 'ensure health lives and promote wellbeing for all ages.'

A Deakin-Wide Approach to Governance

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Division will take a strategic lead in ensuring a coordinated 'whole-of-University' approach, establishing governance of the Strategy and appropriate monitoring and reporting requirements. Individual divisions will drive actions and internal and external partnerships will be integral in ensuring a coordinated effort across the University to deliver this strategy and support the mental health and wellbeing of our students.

Governance of the Strategy, Actions Plans and all mental health and wellbeing related activity will involve:

- A biannual meeting of the Executive Leadership Group, chaired by the Deputy VC Academic. Membership to include Executive Director Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Executive Director Student Services, Dean of Students, CEO DRS, representative People & Culture, Director Research Development and Training, HW&S and DUSA.
- Meetings of Action Leads, as listed per specific projects and initiatives. This group will report biannually to the Executive Leadership Group.
- A Student as Partners Advisory Group (or similar) which will provide feedback, advice, and assist in program evaluation.

Evaluation Framework

Deakin is committed to the effective evaluation and measurement of the impact of this Strategy and annual Action Plans. The 2023 Action Plan will include the development of an evaluation framework for the Strategy.

In the interim, progress and impact will be assessed in a number of different ways, including monitoring and reporting of data relevant to mental health and wellbeing as follows:

- a) Student lived experience and survey data.
- b) Referrals, waiting lists and service engagement with Deakin support services.
- c) Engagement and evaluation of mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

A bi-annual report will be collated and provided to the Executive Leadership group, monitoring progress and guiding future actions.



A plan that aligns with Deakin's strategic and legislative responsibilities

The Strategy aligns closely with the Deakin Values, objectives outlined in [Deakin 2030: Ideas to Impact](#) and it establishes a framework through which Deakin can maintain compliance with its legislative and compliance obligations, particularly in relation to TEQSA's [Higher Education Standards \(HES\) Framework 2015](#) Section 2.3: Wellbeing and Safety. These Standards require providers to provide timely and accurate advice on access to student support services and to promote and foster a safe environment on campus and online, ensuring that the nature and extent of support services available to students is informed by the needs of the student cohort, including their mental health, disability and wellbeing needs.

The Strategy also contributes to Deakin's compliance with Section 22 of the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) (Cth) which prohibits education providers from discriminating, directly or indirectly, against a person on the grounds of a person's disability or mental health condition. The Strategy also supports Deakin's alignment with the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment's [Disability Standards for Education](#) (2005) (the Standards) which were reviewed in 2020. The Standards require education providers take reasonable steps to ensure students with disability or mental health conditions can participate in university life and have access to facilities or services on the same basis as a student without a disability or mental health condition.

The Strategy is aligned with and supports other Deakin strategic planning documents including the:

- [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy 2020-25](#)
- [Education and Employability Guiding Plan](#)
- [Disability Access and Inclusion Plan](#)
- [Respect and Sexual Harm Strategy](#)
- [Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- [Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-23](#)

This Strategy has also been guided by existing and emerging best-practice literature including:

- [Under the radar](#). The mental health of Australian university students. Melbourne: Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2017
- [A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities](#), Enhancing Student Wellbeing, 2016
- [Clusters of COVID Impact: Identifying the Impact of COVID-19 on Young Australians in 2021](#), Mission Australia and Orygen
- [A Global Framework for Youth Mental Health: Investing in Future Mental Capital for Individuals, Communities, and Economies](#), World Economic Forum, 2020

Deakin recognises and acknowledges that this Strategy is developed in a dynamic environment, and we will continue to be agile in supporting student mental health and wellbeing, taking into account Victoria's Mental Health Reforms, proposed amendments to Victorian Occupational Health and Safety, and Universities Australia and Suicide Prevention Australia's Suicide Prevention Framework.



Contact

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