



Australian
National
University



MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY
July 2015

P R E A M B L E

In recognising the increasing need for an institutional approach to mental health, The Australian National University has developed a mental health strategy in conjunction with key stakeholders.

With the aim of nurturing a campus conducive to good mental health, this strategy is influenced by the overarching 'Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health' as developed by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services in conjunction with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CACUSS & CMHA, 2013).

The framework as adapted for the current purpose is summarised below, with an emphasis on mental health and wellbeing inclusive of students and staff, and in recognition of the diverse community and wider contextual environment.

For further detail, please refer to the original framework document.

The framework comprises three target populations:

- > An all-inclusive institutional (staff and student) approach;
- > Tailored assistance for students or staff with identified coping concerns; and
- > Individual-specific intervention for students or staff with immediate mental health concerns.

The framework (pictured on page 4) is consistent with a stepped-care model for health and wellbeing. The underlying principle is that of a graduated response to mental health, determined by need.

This includes a focus on the following seven components, which progress across the three target populations, from institutional to individual intervention:

1. Institutional Structure: Organisation, Planning, and Policy

To create and enhance an institutional culture supportive of mental health and wellbeing, through the framing of mental health in organisational structure, policy and planning.

2. Supportive, Inclusive Campus Climate and Environment

To increase staff and student engagement, connectedness, and meaningful participation in the learning environment, with an acknowledgement of the diverse community, and a strong emphasis on stigma reduction and collaborative sharing of resources.

3. Mental Health Awareness and Literacy

To increase staff and student knowledge and understanding of mental health issues, especially their nature, determinants, impact, management and prevention.

4. Community Capacity to Respond to Early Indicators of Concern

To improve early recognition of mental health issues and timely access to relevant resources and support, through the provision of related training programs and centralisation of mental health resources.

5. Self-Management Competencies and Coping Skills

To strengthen resilience and coping skills in the context of academic demands, for those with identified coping concerns, to decrease vulnerability to mental illness.

6. Accessible Mental Health Services

To improve timely and coordinated access to relevant university mental health services and referral to community services for staff or students with identified mental health needs, with a service focus on building strengths and recovery.

7. Crisis Management

To ensure a well-communicated, coordinated, and timely campus response to mental health crises (situations of acute distress and imminent risk of harm to self or others), including the clarification of staff and student role expectations and channels of emergency support.

DEFINITIONS

In the development of this strategy, the following definitions have been utilised:

Mental Health

Mental health is defined as mental and social wellbeing in which an individual can realise their potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work fruitfully and productively, and make a contribution in their community (WHO, 2005).

Good mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness, but is the capacity of individuals and groups to interact with one another and the environment, in ways that promote subjective wellbeing, optimal development and the use of cognitive, affective and relational abilities (DoHA & AIHW, 1999).

Mental Health Difficulties

A mental health difficulty interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional and social functioning, but to a lesser extent than a mental illness and is usually temporary. It is often a reaction to life stressors. Mental health difficulties are more common than mental illness.

With effective and appropriate support, mental health difficulties can be resolved. However, at times they may develop into a mental illness.



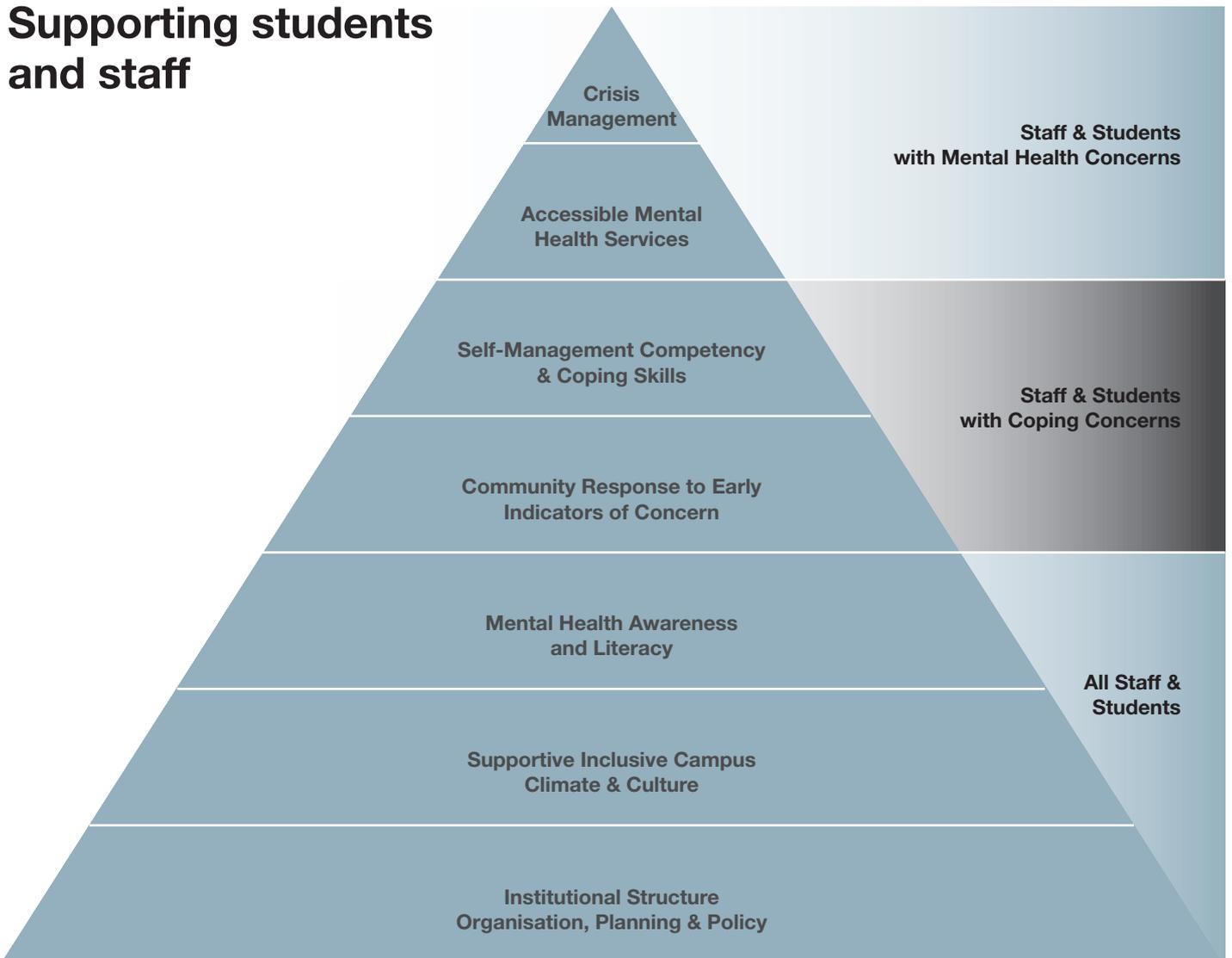
Mental Illness

Mental illness is a term used to describe diagnosable disorders that affect a person's cognitive, emotional and social functioning. There are over 200 recognised mental disorders including depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance abuse.

Mental health is internationally recognised as a major public health concern. In Australia diagnosed mental illnesses are estimated to affect 20 per cent of the population each year (ABS, 2008) and around 45 per cent of people experience a mental health disorder at some stage in their life (ABS, 2008).

MENTAL HEALTH FRAMEWORK

Supporting students and staff



(Adapted from Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health, CACUSS & CMHA, 2013)

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Mental health difficulties can significantly reduce the capacity of students and staff to meet the requirements of their course of study or employment.

They can also restrict academic performance, affect relationships and self-confidence, increase isolation, impair problem solving skills and impair help-seeking.

Mental illnesses are prevalent amongst young people. One quarter of 16-34 year olds are estimated to experience mental illness each year (ABS, 2008). In Australia, three quarters (76%) of people who experience mental illness have first onset before the age of 25 years (ABS, 2010). Preliminary studies suggest that the rate of distress and vulnerability to mental health difficulties amongst university students may be significantly higher than the general population (ABS, 2008; Stallman, 2010; Said, Kypri, & Bowman, 2012). Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that university students report a high level of mental health difficulties but a low level of accessing formal support services (Eisenberg, Golberstein & Gollust, 2007; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005).

The ANU Mental Health Strategy aims to develop and promote an inclusive and respectful community that fosters mental health and wellbeing, provides support, and reduces barriers to access for staff and students experiencing mental illness and mental health difficulties. It reflects the university's commitment to protect the rights of staff and students and to support all staff and students to reach their academic and career potential.



Improve the Institutional and Campus Climate to Promote Wellbeing

Goal

To foster a university community that promotes mental health and wellbeing, encourages mental health literacy, and which recognises the need for a mental health approach that is reflective of the diverse ANU population.

Activities

- > Provide access to published information that promotes mental health and wellbeing, wherever possible in a range of accessible formats and languages.
- > Utilise staff and student health and wellbeing programs as a mechanism for reducing the risk factors relating to mental illness.
- > Provide training and resources for staff and students to improve mental health literacy. Training will include the recognition, management and prevention of mental illness and mental health difficulties and their impact on study, work, relationships and social connectedness.
- > Provide training on discrimination and harassment, appropriate behaviours by university staff and students, and relevant complaints processes.

Measures of Success

- > A training calendar readily available and promoted in university publications.
- > Provision of mental health training and resources to staff and students.
- > Evaluation of mental health training programs by participants.
- > Participation of staff in training on discrimination, harassment and complaints processes relevant to mental illness and mental health difficulties.

Support Staff and Students experiencing Mental Health Difficulties and Mental Illness

Goal

To ensure that students and staff of the university community who are experiencing a coping difficulty or a mental illness are supported by the university in accordance with the principles of equity, fairness and diversity.

Activities

- > Review, develop and implement university policies and procedures that promote social equity and equality of opportunity by incorporating the needs of students and staff with mental illness or mental health difficulties – including admission, recruitment and academic or career progression.
- > Provide services that support staff and students who experience mental illness and mental health difficulties to undertake study and work, including an Employee Assistance Program, Access and Inclusion area, and the University Counselling Centre.
- > Monitor demand for university support services to ensure a timely response to staff and students requiring support.
- > Facilitate reasonable study adjustments for students with mental illness registered with the Access and Inclusion area in cooperation with academic colleges.
- > Develop, promote and distribute information about support available for people experiencing mental illness or mental health difficulties.
- > Develop guidelines that facilitate return to work or study after an approved absence that relates to mental illness or mental health difficulties.
- > Review and update the university's Disability Action Plan at the end of each cycle and lodge with the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Measures of Success

- > Students and staff have access to appropriate on-campus and specialist support services and information that assists them in the management of their mental health.
- > Timely access to university support services.
- > University policies and procedures which accommodate the needs of students and staff who experience mental illness or mental health difficulties.
- > Reasonable adjustments are provided for staff and students with regard to individual needs, academic and work requirements, equity and anti-discrimination legislation.

Support Students and Staff assisting others with Mental Health Difficulties

Goal

To resource and equip staff and students who assist others affected by mental health difficulties to provide appropriate, safe, and effective intervention and support.

Activities

- > Develop and distribute guidelines and information for staff and students about how to assist people who are experiencing a mental illness or mental health difficulties, including referral options and crisis services.
- > Develop guidelines and provide training to staff on responding to a critical incident involving a mental health crisis.
- > Delivery of advice, support and educational material for academic staff, supervisors, colleagues and peers who are supporting a student or staff member experiencing mental health difficulties or mental illness.
- > Provision of support services and debriefing for staff and students following critical incidents.
- > Review and update the Memorandum of Understanding between ANU and Mental Health ACT services to facilitate integrated and timely responses to mental health crises.

Measures of Success

- > Students and staff receive access to information, support and referral options that assists them in supporting someone experiencing mental illness or mental health difficulties.
- > Guidelines are available for members of the university community encountering a mental health crisis or critical incident.
- > Advice, support and debriefing are available to members of the university community who have assisted someone experiencing mental illness or mental health difficulties.

Implementation and Evaluation

The responsibility for implementation and evaluation of this strategy rests with the Mental Health Working Group, chaired by Professor Richard Baker (Pro-Vice Chancellor, Student Experience) and comprised of students, staff, and key university stakeholders. An evaluation and review of the strategy will occur every 3 years, with the next review due in 2017. The working group will meet four times annually to discuss the progress achieved in the associated Operational Plan.

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- > University of Melbourne Mental Health Strategy (2008)
- > University of Canberra Mental Health Strategy (2011–2013)
- > Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions: To facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with a mental illness (The University of Melbourne, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, & Australian Rotary Health)
- > University of Oxford – Mental Health Policy
- > World Health Organisation – Mental Health
- > ACT Health – *Building a Strong Foundation: A framework for promoting mental health and wellbeing in the ACT* (2009–2014)
- > The National Mental Health Strategy Australia (1992, revised 2008)

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