

# Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2021-2023





# Acknowledgement

Deakin University acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our five physical campuses are situated and pay our respects to their Elders: past, present and future. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation on whose land our Geelong campuses are located, the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation on whose land our Melbourne campus and Melbourne Corporate Centre are located, and the Gunditjmara people on whose land our Warrnambool campus is located. 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 Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.



# Introduction

We are a thriving, progressive, respectful and inclusive University community.

Through our **People and Culture Plan 2021-23** we will advance a progressive and thriving culture through creating **Fulfilling Employment** experiences for all our staff to help realise meaningful individual and collective achievement, productivity, engagement and wellbeing.

This Strategy and the Guiding Principles provides a comprehensive framework to drive initiatives to address the current, emerging and future mental health and wellbeing needs of our staff, and deliver a workplace that creates sustainable work; encourages contribution; fosters a diverse, safe and inclusive environment; promotes connectedness and resilience; provides support and enables academic, professional and personal achievement.

Deakin's Employee Wellbeing Support (EWS) program provides confidential, short-term, professional, voluntary and free counselling by qualified external psychologists and social workers.

It is designed to address and resolve both work related and personal problems that may be adversely affecting work performance.

If you or any of your colleagues are experiencing issues you are encouraged to reach out through the EWS program.



# Our purpose

To promote and support positive staff mental health and wellbeing, reduce work-related risk factors while fostering an environment of care, safety, inclusion and support.

# Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle	Actions
Adopt a co-ordinated whole of University approach to staff mental health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise protecting and promoting the mental health of all University staff</li> <li>• Drive best practice positive and sustainable mental health and wellbeing of our staff, enabling Deakin to exceed our compliance obligations</li> <li>• Identify and assess organisational risks to optimise staff mental health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
Create sustainable work and a supportive and inclusive work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimise the quality and sustainability of work and working conditions for all staff</li> <li>• Recognise the evolving context and enable staff to build resilience and support positive mental health and wellbeing in a blended work environment</li> <li>• Reduce stigma and increase organisational collaboration in relation to mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Create a work environment where all staff members feel safe and free from discrimination if they disclose or discuss their mental health and wellbeing concerns or illness</li> <li>• Support staff who disclose a mental health disability or medical condition</li> </ul>
Promote mental health awareness as part of prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and deliver organisational programs targeted at prevention or early intervention in relation to staff mental health</li> <li>• Promote positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives for all staff</li> <li>• Create and promote physical health and social wellbeing initiatives as part of supporting positive mental health</li> </ul>
Develop staff and manager capability in identifying and supporting positive mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve staff and manager ability to recognise opportunities for early intervention by accessing mental health and wellbeing support for themselves, other staff and students</li> <li>• Enhance the capability of all managers in practicing and promoting self-care and ensure they set the tone in building an empathetic community and culture supportive of good mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Leverage and connect with our academic and professional experts to develop innovative mental health and wellbeing initiatives to support staff mental health</li> </ul>
Encourage and provide accessible and timely support to enable positive mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote mental health as a non-linear continuum with a range of support available</li> <li>• Provide a comprehensive range of resources to all staff available throughout the employee life cycle to support their mental health and wellbeing: For example: EWS program, mindfulness and wellbeing programs</li> <li>• Provide targeted information, support and programs for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Staff experiencing mental health concerns and/or mental illness</li> <li>◦ CALD, LGBTIQ, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff</li> <li>◦ Managers of staff</li> <li>◦ Staff who are supporting students with their mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>◦ HDR students, who are also employed by the University</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop strong external partnerships to support staff mental health and wellbeing For example: Beyond Blue, Worksafe, Head Space</li> </ul>

# An integrated implementation approach

In supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our staff, we must be agile, innovative, proactive and rapidly responsive. The integrated approach to workplace mental health details the essential areas of action to protect and promote mental health at work while also meeting the University's obligations to provide sustainable work in an inclusive and non-discriminatory work environment.

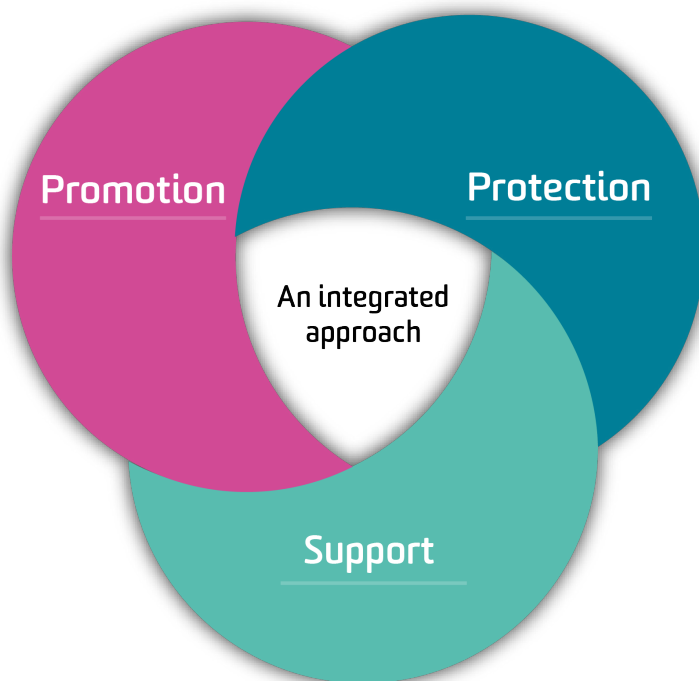


Diagram 1: An integrated approach to workplace mental health based on Anthony La Montagne's model (adapted)

An integrated approach to workplace mental health encompasses three main areas of activity:

- (i) promote mental health and wellbeing, the positive aspects of work and develop the strengths and capacities of our staff,
- (ii) protect mental health by implementing preventative measures and by reducing work-related and other risk factors for mental health concerns, and
- (iii) respond to mental health concerns as they manifest at work regardless of cause (work-related or otherwise).

This integrated approach recognises the role of the University in assessing psychosocial risk, developing responses to identified risks and seeking to optimise working conditions with respect to mental health.

The initiatives that will be developed and implemented to deliver this Strategy will align with the three focus areas – promotion, protection and support. The initiatives will also recognise and reflect that an individual's mental health and wellbeing is part of a continuum with gradual or significant changes at any time.



Our aim is to enable staff to work with optimal mental wellbeing and minimise the adverse impact of mental health concerns or mental illness in participating in work.

As leaders, managers and colleagues we all have a collective responsibility to promote and provide a work environment where all staff are supported to thrive regardless of their mental health and wellbeing needs.

The outcomes and initiatives under the Strategy will provide practical and meaningful supports across diverse groups including experienced or new leaders, colleagues of an individual who has disclosed a mental health illness or concern or individual staff members experiencing limited mental wellbeing. Deakin is committed to providing quality and sustainable work and a safe and supportive work environment where our staff can come forward, speak up and seek help when experiencing any mental health illness or concern.

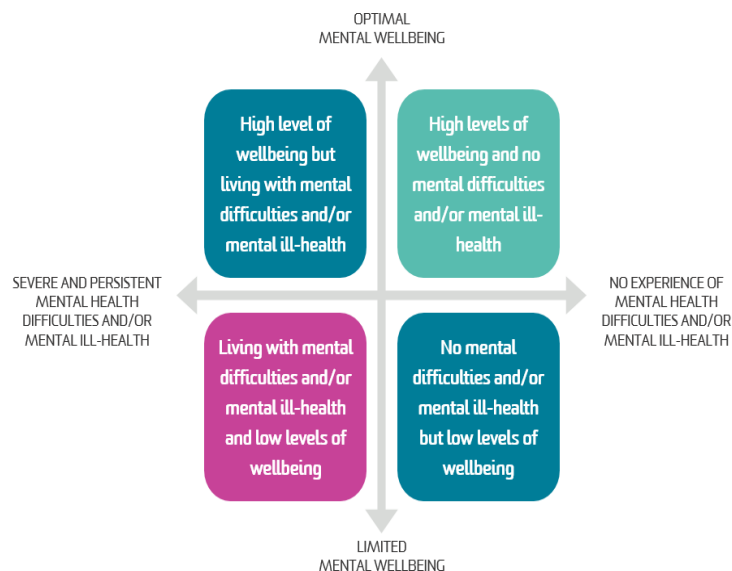


Diagram 2: Dual Continua Model of Mental Health (adapted)

## Implementation

Integrated annual action plans will facilitate the Strategy, with targeted initiatives to ensure the delivery of each Guiding Principle. The first action plan will incorporate initiatives already in place before the development of the Strategy, as well as priority initiatives for 2021 to support staff experiencing changes in their mental health and wellbeing in these evolving times.

Implementation in each year thereafter will include analysis of existing initiatives, identification of gaps and emerging opportunities and prioritising of solutions to support the delivery of each of the Guiding Principles in the Strategy.

Clear outcomes, monitoring and communication of the initiatives in the action plans will be established aligned to the integrated approach focus areas of promotion, protection and support.

## Success

The success of the Strategy requires a whole of University approach, bringing together specialist knowledge and expertise across Deakin and in partnership with external experts. The involvement of the University's academic leaders in mental health and wellbeing will be critical in developing initiatives and assessing their effectiveness.

## Partnerships

Both internal and external partnerships will be integral in delivering this Strategy for staff.

The Staff Wellbeing team within the Human Resources Division is responsible for leading this Strategy. This team will lead the implementation of the five Guiding Principles over the life of the Strategy with the following partners:

- Staff
- Health and Safety professionals across Faculties and Portfolios
- Leading internal academic experts
- Division of Student Life
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Health and Safety
- Other staff within the Human Resources Division
- Managers of staff
- External agencies and providers

# Terminology



## Mental health

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual can realise their own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution in their community.

Mental health is a continuum ranging from good mental health (or mental wellbeing) to mental health problems/difficulties and mental illness.

## Crisis

A personal reaction to an event or experience in their life a person finds hard to cope with. A mental health crisis can include a psychotic episode, self-harm, feeling suicidal and feeling out of control.

## Good mental health/mental wellbeing

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.





## Mental health concern

A mental health concern 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 problems are more common than mental illness. With effective and appropriate support, mental health problems can be resolved. However, at times they may develop into a mental illness.

## Mental illness

Mental health condition/mental illness is a term used to describe diagnosable disorders that significantly affect a person's cognitive, emotional and social functioning. There are over 200 recognised mental disorders including anxiety, depression, substance use and eating disorders.

## Resilience

The timely capacity of individuals and groups—family, community, country, and enterprise—to be more generative during times of stability and to adapt, reorganise, and grow in response to disruption.

## Determinants of mental health

There are a range of other factors that influence the health status of individuals and communities, such as social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions. These are known as determinants of health. For mental health these include factors such as the provision of sustainable work, social isolation, low income, unemployment, housing instability and food insecurity.

\*This terminology is consistent with that used in the Deakin Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2022

## Contact us

For further information, please  
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