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Monash University Mental Health Services – Response to the Australian Productivity Commission Draft Report on Mental Health

On behalf of Monash University’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, this written submission will respond to several of the Productivity Commission’s requests for information and draft recommendations related to mental health and tertiary education.

Draft Recommendation 18.2 (p. 727) – Student mental health and wellbeing strategy in tertiary education institutions

Monash University strongly supports the recommendation “to require all tertiary education institutions to have a student mental health and wellbeing strategy”, but would extend the recommendation to include staff as part of the same strategy.

As recommended in the Draft Report (p. 725), Monash pursues a “whole-of-institution approach” to mental health: providing in-house counselling services, referring students to appropriate external services, connecting with community-based mental health services, training staff about mental health, and providing wellbeing and resilience initiatives.

The Monash University Counselling Service operates under a six-tiered university wide Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (see Appendix B) which aims to provide a strong community focus through programs and services which de-stigmatise mental health issues, foster resilience and wellbeing, enable early identification and intervention for those who are struggling, and enable easy access to triage, brief counselling, and referral, as well as a rapid response to those in need of emergency mental health management.

The core elements and strategic goals of these six tiers can be seen in the diagram on page 3 of our strategy document (Appendix B). These six tiers, along with our Mental Health Policy (Appendix A), address all the dot points listed under Draft Recommendation 18.2, demonstrating that this recommendation is feasible and aligns well with Monash University’s strategic goals.

In 2014 our counselling service merged with the University Health Services and moved into a newly built Health Services precinct. It shares common reception and waiting areas with the general practitioners which promotes greater communication between primary and allied health practitioners. This produces a holistic service for patients.

The Draft Report (p. 721) notes that “There have been calls for tertiary education providers to develop partnerships with external service providers.”

Aligning with this advice, in 2016 the Monash counselling service undertook a significant restructure that resulted in the new structure of service provision that exists today. The new structure is currently unique among tertiary institutions, going beyond the traditional model of university-employed psychologists to add several other forms of service delivery – namely partnering with private contractor psychologists and licensed (Medicare) psychologists. These alternatives increase the number of patients and consultations the service can provide for. First, private psychologists can see more patients because they lack the extra responsibilities of university-employed psychologists (e.g. running our mental health programs, advising Faculty staff, participating in our critical incident and recovery teams). Second, licensed psychologists are 100% funded through Medicare, greatly increasing our capacity for student counselling appointments at no cost other than providing office and reception services. Moreover, our partnerships with SECASA (South East Centre Against Sexual Assault), Link Health and Community (drug & alcohol), and EDVOS (Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service) are seamlessly integrated into our services: provided in- house, on campus, and at no extra cost to students. In addition to addressing these areas, such “external service providers... can assist students in specialised areas which are outside the scope of university counselling services” (Curtin Student Guild; in Draft Report, p. 721).

Counselling Services at Monash are currently provided directly by:

- University-employed psychologists (the traditional and most widespread model in Australian universities);
- Private psychologists under contract to Monash, with their services paid (by Monash) per counselling session delivered;
- Private psychologists and psychiatrists working under a License Agreement with their services bulk billed to Medicare or to our Overseas Student Health Insurance Provider;
- Counsellors specialised in sexual assault, addiction, and family violence, engaged from external agencies;
- An external Employee Assistance Program for staff and rural and remote students;
- An Online Counselling email service, staffed by Monash-employed psychologists;
- A range of targeted Mental Health Literacy programs provided free to students. These include Mental Health First Aid (a 12-hour program), safeTALK (a 4-hour suicide awareness and prevention program), and Understanding Mental Health at Monash (a 3-hour program);
- A mature and sophisticated range of Mindfulness programs both online and embedded in curriculum in a number of faculties which teach relaxation, concentration, and mental focus skills that are essential to building resilience and fostering academic achievement.

In 2018 the counselling service saw **6018** individual students and staff for a total of **19,611** consultations for face-to-face counselling. These data represent a **17.3% increase in patients** and an **11.5% increase in consultations** provided in **2018 compared with 2017**.

In 2019 the counselling service saw **7215** individual students and staff for a total of **23,073** consultations for face-to-face counselling. These data represent a **20% increase in patients** and an **18% increase in consultations** provided in **2019 compared with 2018**.

These outcomes were achieved through the increased use of private contractor psychologists and licensed (Medicare) psychologists.

These increases in patients seen (2017–2019) are of particular significance as this demonstrates the resources provided to the university counselling service, and the way these resources are allocated, are enabling access to many more students who need the service. This has been possible through the increased use of same day new patient appointments and utilising the available consulting rooms at Clayton and Caulfield University Health Services sites in particular.

We would suggest the Commission recommends that all universities provide services that enable all students with severe to acute mental health presentations to be seen urgently, preferably on the same day as they present to the service.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 18.1 — TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In the short term (in the next 2 years)

The Australian Government should amend the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 and the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 to require:

- all teaching staff to undertake training on student mental health and wellbeing
- all tertiary education providers to make available guidance for teaching staff on what they should do if a student approaches them with a mental health concern and how they can support student mental health.

Academic supervisors and undergraduate tutors are often viewed by students as a trusted first point of contact for mental health queries. We agree that training these staff (in particular) in supporting student mental health is an important goal, and hence an important component of Monash’s strategy.

While we agree that there needs to be a significant increase in the number of teaching staff who are trained in mental health and wellbeing, we are concerned that to “require all teaching staff” to undertake such training will place too large a financial demand on tertiary education institutions. Monash does make such training available to staff (see below) and while it is not financially feasible to offer this to them free of charge, and thus make it mandatory, staff are encouraged, especially through their annual development plans. This training is, however, made available to students free of charge.

At the same time as this recommendation is too financially demanding, it could also be useful to broaden its scope. Rather than only mentioning “teaching staff”, it should also cover all ‘student-facing’ professional staff. The availability of training in universities should be increased.

What type and level of training should be provided to teaching staff to better support students' mental health and wellbeing?

Mental health literacy training should be a priority area of training for teaching staff to better support students' mental health and wellbeing, at all Australian universities. There are a number of excellent, effective courses available for this purpose that many universities are already providing however more academic staff should be required to do this training. These courses range from 3 hours to 2 days. The important learning outcomes from undertaking these courses must be at a minimum, the ability to identify emerging mental health issues and the knowledge of how to encourage the student to get the appropriate professional help and where to get it.

Monash University provides a range of mental health literacy programs to students and staff. The rationale for this is that at least all student-facing roles, both academic and professional, should have the skills taught in these programs.

The **Mental Health First Aid** training workshop is designed to equip participants with resources to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis until professional help is available. It teaches participants how to:

- help people in the early stages of mental health problems
- recognise the signs and symptoms of these problems
- know where and how to get help
- understand what types of help are effective.

SafeTALK is a half-day alertness workshop that prepares anyone, regardless of experience or training, to become a suicide-alert helper. It teaches participants to:

- notice and respond to situations where thoughts of suicide may be present
- provide practical help by using the TALK steps (Tell, Ask, Listen and Keep safe)
- act quickly to connect the person with someone trained in suicide intervention
- contribute to building a safer community.

In our **Understanding Mental Health** seminar, participants learn about the symptoms and warning signs for the common mental health problems (anxiety, depression, psychosis, and self-harming behaviour). At the end of the seminar, participants should expect to have increased confidence when responding to a person who may have mental health issues. Participants will be able to provide information on the support services available with the university and in the wider community.

As a world leader in the practice of **mindfulness**, Monash also provides staff and students with the opportunity to learn mindfulness skills to improve resilience and work and study performance. In 2018, Mindfulness training was delivered to 6464 students (4830) and staff (1643). Of the 4830 students, 4210 received mindfulness training as part of their core curriculum. Mindfulness is now embedded into 18 academic units in 10 faculties.

Both our online courses (MOOCs), 'Mindfulness for Wellbeing and Peak Performance' and 'Maintaining a Mindful Life', are now in Class Central's top 50 online courses of all time. A total of 70,476 people from all around the world completed these courses in 2018. Over 310,000 people have completed them since they first ran in 2015.

INFORMATION REQUEST 3.1 — EDUCATION ACTIVITIES THAT SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We are seeking information or methodologies that would help us to estimate the cost of activities undertaken by educational institutions in supporting mental health and wellbeing of students.

We agree on the need for a methodology that could be applied across the sector to gather this information. However, the breadth and complexity of mental health initiatives in the sector (at least for Monash) make estimating such costs extremely challenging. Some of these include:

1. Providing clinical services. This is only a small part of the overall cost to improve the mental health of the Monash community. There is also the work of the Safer Community Unit, Inclusive Communities, Student Engagement, all of the work of Campus Community Division, Human Resources, and OHS, as well as Faculty-based initiatives such as Orientation camps and mentor programs.
2. Externally provided specialist sexual assault, addiction, and family violence counsellors. Although they are provided at no cost to Monash, they have their own government funding sources.
3. Commonwealth contributions to clinical services through the payment of Medicare rebates for our licensed psychologists and psychiatrists.
4. Monash funding for the contract with Benestar (an Employee Assistance Program) through HR. This program provides counselling primarily to staff.
5. Mental Health First Aid courses for students; funded through the student services amenity fee (SSAF).
6. Monash Residential Services provides a range of mental health literacy programs as well as a comprehensive pastoral care program.

INFORMATION REQUEST 18.1 — GREATER USE OF ONLINE SERVICES

Should tertiary institutions play a more active role in promoting the use of online services for student mental health? To what extent could (and should) an increase in the use of online services in tertiary institutions be used to improve information on, and practical support for, the mental health of student populations?

Monash fully supports the increased use and promotion of online services in tertiary institutions: a core goal that Monash has pursued successfully since it first implemented a Mental Health strategy in 2013. Although most students who request counselling want to access a face to face counsellor, online counselling does provide a service that enables some students to access professional help when they otherwise may not do so. The reasons for this include:

- Anxiety around speaking to a mental health professional often due to stigma
- Social and generalized anxiety which restricts a student's presence on campus
- Off-campus enrollment with the student living in a remote location
- Accessible 24/7 (Monash's model)
- Students studying overseas on exchange programs

While demand for all counselling services at Monash has grown from 2014–2018, growth in online counselling has far exceeded face-to-face counselling: students accessing the service increased by 173% (online) compared to 71.2% (face-to-face). We know the way most students hear about counselling is from friends through word of mouth, so this rapid growth suggests our online service delivers valuable support to student populations who then spread word of the benefits to their friends.

The online counselling service is provided only by the Monash-employed staff psychologists who are specially trained for this modality of service provision.

INFORMATION REQUEST 18.3 — INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Productivity Commission is seeking more information on:

- *the difficulties international students face accessing mental health services, including any problems with the Overseas Student Health Cover and the merits of requiring tertiary institutions to take responsibility for ensuring their international students have sufficient healthcare cover*
- *what reforms are required to improve the treatment of and support provided to international students.*

In February 2019 the Victorian Coroner released findings into the suicide death of an international student. The report suggested that “international students experience a unique range of stressors that can impact on their mental health and wellbeing, including financial, cultural and linguistic”.

Furthermore, a report produced by Study Melbourne following a recent International Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Forum in December 2019 found there is “generally lower wellbeing/life satisfaction due to a range of unique stressors – financial (cost of living, accommodation, part-time jobs), social (isolation, language, discrimination) and psychological (pressure to succeed, mental health literacy), and an increased risk of poor mental health on top of other factors impacting young people/students”.

Despite the general view that international students “are less likely to seek help for mental ill health... likely due to cultural barriers and issues accessing support” (Draft Report, p. 724), we have seen the following encouraging trend at Monash in the percentages (per year) of counselling service clients who are international students:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
% of clients who are international students	24.6%	30.7%	32.2%	36.2%	42.4%

There are a wide range of factors which have contributed to this trend, but this does demonstrate that international students are willing to use the service when barriers to access are reduced. The Draft Report (p. 720) identifies that methods to encourage help-seeking behaviour can include “offering different disclosure channels, including online options, and times”. Monash’s significant growth in online counselling (described earlier) could thus also be an important factor in this growth of international students taking up counselling services. Other important contributing factors include the increase in available appointments and increasing cultural diversity and languages spoken within the Monash clinical team – both general practitioners and psychologists.

Conclusion

Monash University has focused on improving student and staff mental health and wellbeing as a core priority for around seven years. Through research, policies, and programs we have developed world-leading expertise and experience in this domain. Our unique model of counselling service delivery stands out as an important success, and it is only one part of a whole-of-institution approach.

Institutions need a diverse range of programs, people, and services; delivered online, in the clinic (alongside general practitioners), and in the community. We need to generate a broader environmental and cultural change that builds resilience, facilitates social connections, engages students and staff, improves mental health literacy, and reduces stigma.

Monash's experience has been that where additional psychological counselling appointments are required (and the demand from students is ever increasing), engaging psychologists accessing Medicare through the 'Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care' program is a cost-effective way to dramatically and quickly build clinical capacity. Although external agencies (such as headspace) could provide this model, Monash has the experience of bringing these practitioners 'in house' by using license agreements between the university and the practitioner. This ensures that all the clinical resources of the University Health Services, general practitioners, psychologists, mental health and triage nurses, and psychiatrists are delivered in a coordinated and integrated whole of person health service – providing the best possible outcome for the patient.

Although we suggest a few refinements, the lessons and recommendations of the Commission's Draft Report align closely with Monash's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We broadly endorse the Commission's findings, and anticipate that the Final Report will greatly contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing across the tertiary sector.

Appendix A: Monash University
Mental Health Policy, November 2018

MONASH UNIVERSITY MENTAL HEALTH POLICY
 Approved by Standing Committee on Mental Health
 Meeting 2/2018

Policy Title	Mental Health Policy
Date Effective	November 2018
Review Date	November 2021
Category	Operational
Policy Owners	Executive Director, Campus Community Division Chief Medical Officer
Version Number	3.0
Content Enquiries	campuscommunitydivision@monash.edu
Scope	All staff (including adjuncts and honorary) All students All Australian Campuses and teaching locations
Purpose	To express the institutional commitment of Monash University to provide a supportive learning community for students and staff through a strategic framework that: (i) prioritises mental health; (ii) enables access to excellent care and support for those who need such services; and (iii) promotes awareness of services and relevant initiatives available within the University and the external community.
POLICY STATEMENT	
<p>Monash University recognises the importance of positive Mental Health and Wellbeing among students and staff, and is committed to facilitating and promoting a mental health and wellbeing environment that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers excellent professional mental health services in a manner that is consistent with best practice nationally and internationally; • Responds to the needs of students and staff who are experiencing mental health difficulties by providing a range of responsive programs and services; • Encourages staff and students with mental health concerns to seek assistance; • Provides guidance and training to staff and students on responding appropriately to those experiencing mental health difficulties; • Promotes understanding and recognition of mental health issues for all through awareness-raising and education; • Ensures that the sources of support and advice are clearly and widely communicated to staff and students; • Promotes a culture that produces positive mental health outcomes when creating policies, strategies and processes. 	

Supporting Procedures	Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
Responsibility for implementation	Chief Medical Officer Director, Counselling and Mental Health Programs
Status	In progress
Approval Body	Name: Standing Committee on Mental Health Meeting: 2/2018 Date: Thursday 25 October 2018 Agenda item: 4
Endorsement Body	Name: VCEC Meeting: Date: February 2019 Agenda Item:
Definitions	Not applicable
Legislation Mandating Compliance (subject to review by OGC)	Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic) Disability Discrimination Act (1992) (Commonwealth) Mental Health Act 2014 (Vic)
Related Policies	Equal Opportunity Policy Health and Wellbeing Policy www.monash.edu/health/home Integrity and Respect Policy Leave and Wellbeing Policy Monash University Student Charter Occupational Health and Safety Policy
Related Documents	Monash University Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, October 2018 (hotlink) Higher Education Standards Panel Final Report – Improving Retention, Completion and Success in Higher Education. <i>Department of Education and Training</i> 7 June 2018 https://docs.education.gov.au/node/50816 Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)

Appendix B: Monash University Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018–2020



MONASH
University

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

2018-2020



OCTOBER 2019

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Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Monash University is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of our students and staff in support of a healthy University community that strives to achieve excellence and foster inclusion.

The Monash approach is 'whole of university', recognising the role of multiple factors and influences in achieving good mental health. This involves providing an array of avenues through which students and staff can be educated on signs and symptoms of mental illness and in developing strategies to enhance their individual and collective wellbeing.

Developing resilience is central to the experience of students and in building their lifelong capabilities for success. For staff, creating supportive environments is key to enabling their satisfaction and indeed performance. Taken together the University community is able to thrive and flourish.

The many initiatives delivered by the University are underpinned by clear policies that are in support of a healthy community. Wherever possible, Monash seeks to learn from others, to deliver the best possible experience for students and staff.

Building on decades of practice, our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy outlines our goals over the coming years.

Executive sponsors

When we are all equipped to thrive, we can create lasting impact together. Our approach to mental health and wellbeing has support across the entire University, endorsed by our executive sponsors at the highest level.

Professor David Copolov AO

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Major Campuses and Student Engagement)

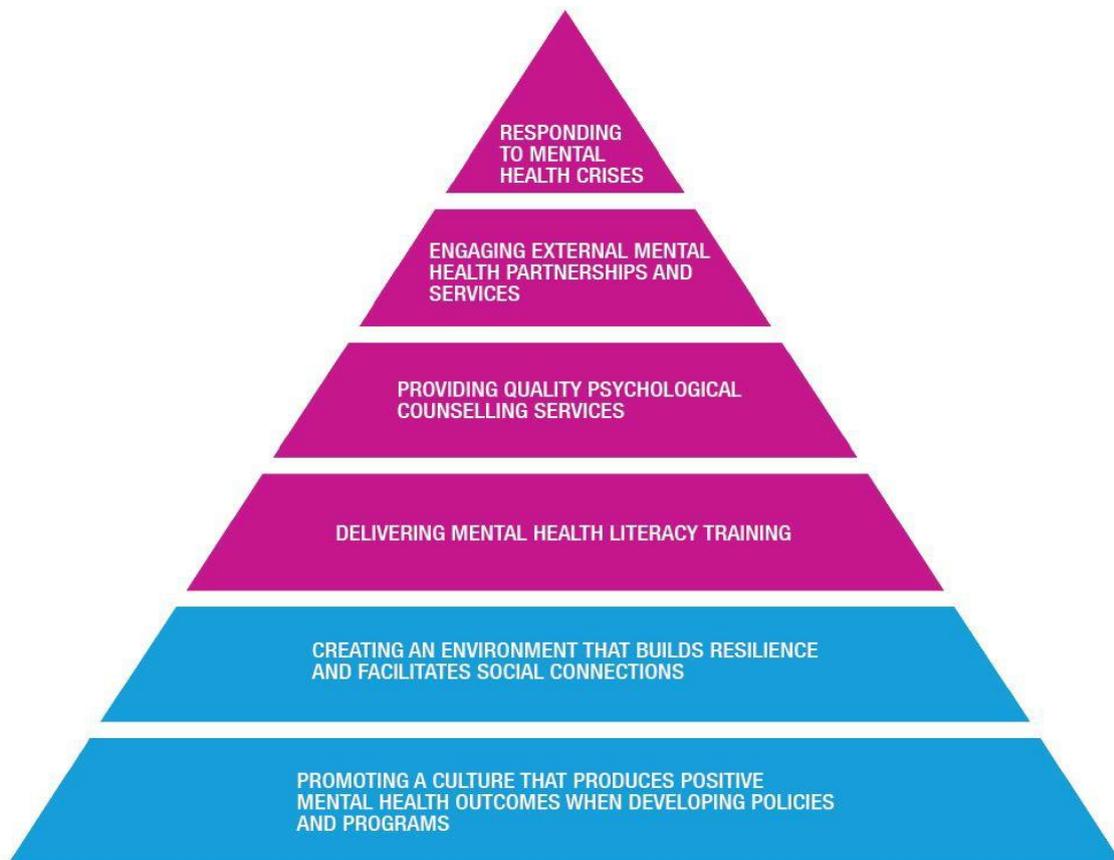
Professor Susan Elliott AM

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Education)

Mr Vladimir Prpich

Executive Director, Campus Community Division

Strategic goals



- Key:**
- Services primarily delivered by Counselling and Mental Health Programs unit
 - Programs and initiatives involving the faculties and the wider University community

The specialist support of the Counselling and Mental Health Programs area occupies a critical position within the overall strategy

The success of these efforts will be measured in a number of ways, including the quality of our student experience, student retention measures and staff engagement surveys.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy is underpinned by data, evidence, and evaluation. Multiple stakeholders across the University play a part.

Action plan

Responding to mental health crises

We have well-established processes to respond to students and staff experiencing acute mental distress. Core to this area of work is the collaborative partnership between the University Counselling and Mental Health programs unit, with University Health Services, University Security, Monash Residential Services, and the Safer Community Unit in responding to crises as they arise.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Engaging mental health nurses and providing support for students living on-campus
- Mental Health nurses are available at examination venues.

Engaging external mental health partnerships and services

We have strong links with local community mental health services and specialist services for students and staff requiring more complex support. The Counselling and Mental Health program unit has also introduced a number of specialist support services, such as Medicare-funded psychiatrists and psychologists, and SECASA sexual assault trauma specialist counselling. Mental health first aid nurses provide support with the development of safety and support plans for students experiencing crises whilst living on-campus.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Introducing Link Drug and Alcohol Counselling service
- Introducing Eastern Domestic Violence service (EDVOS)
- Expanding triage nurse model to Caulfield campus.

Providing quality psychological counselling services

Students are able to access free face-to-face counselling services from qualified psychologists and psychiatrists at all campuses, with online counselling also available at Australian campuses. Some faculties offer face-to-face counselling for students and staff.

Staff can receive free counselling (up to three sessions), 24-hour telephone counselling, and other support provided through the Employee Assistance Program (six sessions). After-hours counselling appointments are available.

Students with a disability, medical, or mental health condition receive assistance from Disability Support Services to help them participate productively and independently in their studies.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Strengthening evaluation systems within counselling services

- Strengthening the cultural and linguistic capability of counselling services
- Investigating the provision of faculty-based counselling support
- Reviewing Employee Assistance Provider

Delivering mental health literacy training

The Counselling and Mental Health Programs unit delivers a suite of mental health programs to educate students and staff about common mental health issues and about how to support others going through a difficult time. These programs range from online training such as Stress Management modules, to workshops such as Mental Health First Aid and Safe Talk (suicide prevention), and to campaigns such as RUOK? Day. These initiatives are delivered with the intention of fostering a culture of help-seeking.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Continuing the expansion of mental health literacy training
- Ongoing enhancement of workshops and campaigns.

Creating an environment that builds resilience and facilitates social connections

Through our programs, we aim to help develop resilience, improve performance, and facilitate social connections. Annually, the University enables a wide range of student engagement programs to build community, including TeamMonash, Non-Residential Colleges and English Connect (the latter offering a number of co-curricular programs focusing on developing communication skills and academic and conversational language in cultural contexts.)

Offering a dedicated, comprehensive pastoral care model, Monash Residential services provides a 'community within a community' for students living on-campus.

Monash is a world leader in the practice of Mindfulness, with well-embedded programs in the curriculum of specific faculties. Monash HR facilitates dedicated programs to strengthen the capability of staff to manage their workload and navigate difficult conversations, while Wellbeing at Monash cultivates positive mental health strengthening for staff through initiatives such as the Staff Wellbeing and Activity program.

More broadly, Respectful Relationships training and faculty-based mentoring promote a culture of inclusion within staff and student cohorts. The University welcomes the passion of students wanting to contribute to the promotion of mental health, through peer-to-peer programs such as Mental Health Champions.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Reviewing faculty-based mentoring support
- Piloting faculty-based student peer mentoring program
- Introducing *Respect. Now. Always.* initiatives, including *Respect. Now. Always.* day, Respectful Relationships training, first responder training, and bystander intervention training

- Expanding staff mindfulness and wellbeing programs
- Expanding curricular content in faculties focused on mental health outcomes for students
- Reviewing Staff Wellbeing Activity program offerings and implementing recommendations
- Refreshing Alcohol and Drugs program for students living on-campus
- Introducing Orientation support app for international students
- Strengthening creation of on-campus student engagement events in partnership with Monash Student Organisations.

Promoting a culture that produces positive mental health outcomes when developing policies and programs

The Mental Health policy (under review in 2019) informs the overarching strategy for the delivery of mental health services for staff and students. It expresses the commitment of Monash University to “facilitate and promote positive mental health and wellbeing by providing a safe, healthy and supportive environment.”

In designing other relevant policies, procedures, and practices (including course design and staff workload) related to the student and staff experience, the University seeks to ensure they all work in tandem to promote a culture of positive mental health outcomes.

Initiatives 2018-2020

- Refreshing the University-wide mental health strategy (completed)
- Upgrading and enhancing the Mental Health policy (in place for five years)
- Facilitating partnerships through the university-wide Student Mental Health forum
- Strengthening partnership arrangements for staff wellbeing programs
- Scoping a longitudinal health promotion project exploring the impact of the Monash experience
- Reviewing examination, assessment and special consideration policies to align with Mental Health policy documents
- Reviewing the communications approach for mental health services and wellbeing initiatives

Key Performance Indicators

Students:

We wish to positively contribute the following measures of success:

- Overall student experience via the annual Student Experience Survey
- Overall retention and attrition rates

Our work will be measured by:

- Results of the University Counselling Services survey
- Year-on-year usage data of the University Counselling Service
- Impact of various Campus Community initiatives
- Education-focussed research measuring student wellbeing and study engagement.

Staff:

Our work will be measured by overall staff satisfaction, as measured by the VOICES Staff Engagement Survey.

Governance

The Standing Committee on Mental Health meets twice a year and oversees the implementation of the University's Mental Health policy and Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy. The Committee is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Major Campuses and Student Engagement) and its membership reflects central divisions, faculties and students.

The Standing Committee reports to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee, to which it provides an annual report on mental health outcomes.

October 2019