



ACU Student Mental Health Strategy and Implementation Plan

Introduction



The increasing prevalence and complexity of mental health difficulties among university students can significantly impact their capacity to study and engage in social activities, which in turn affects their academic performance and course progression.

With this in mind, our ACU Student Mental Health Strategy takes a whole-of-university approach to improving student mental health. It addresses risk factors so students can achieve their academic, social and professional goals. Our staff are supported to engage with all of our students from a whole-of-person perspective, grounded in mission.

With our strategy, we are committed to fostering a safe and inclusive environment that actively works to promote positive mental health and wellbeing across our entire University community.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Greg Craven'.

Professor Greg Craven, AO GCSG
Vice-Chancellor and President

Background

Research data, and our own experience with students, confirms many are affected by mental health conditions that directly impact their capacity to fully engage with their studies.

Most mental health conditions emerge prior to the age of 25 years¹, for significant numbers of students, attendance at university coincides with the initial onset of a mental health condition. Students often experience considerable levels of stress. This results in a greater prevalence of university students having a mental health condition than their peers in the general community.

Given this situation, it is incumbent upon universities to have systems and structures in place to support students who experience mental health conditions. University-wide opportunities to engage in programs focusing on mental health literacy should be available to all. These programs impact directly on all students by enhancing their mental health literacy, fostering an environment that supports their wellbeing and is inclusive of those with mental health conditions.

Strategic Objectives



1. To raise awareness and promote positive mental health among ACU students.



2. To reduce any stigma associated with mental health conditions by enhancing mental health literacy among ACU students and staff.



3. To facilitate a whole-of-university approach to supporting students with mental health difficulties, giving them the best opportunities to continue and succeed in their studies.



4. To promote the wellbeing of all students by establishing sustainable preventative programs, particularly targeting students who are at greater risk of experiencing mental health conditions or difficulties.

¹ McGorry, P., Purcell, R., Goldstone, S., and Amminger, G. (2011). Age of onset and timing of treatment for mental and substance use conditions: implications for preventive intervention strategies and models of care. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 24, 301-306.
Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. *Under the radar. The mental health of Australian university students*. Melbourne: Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2017.

ACU's Mental Health Framework

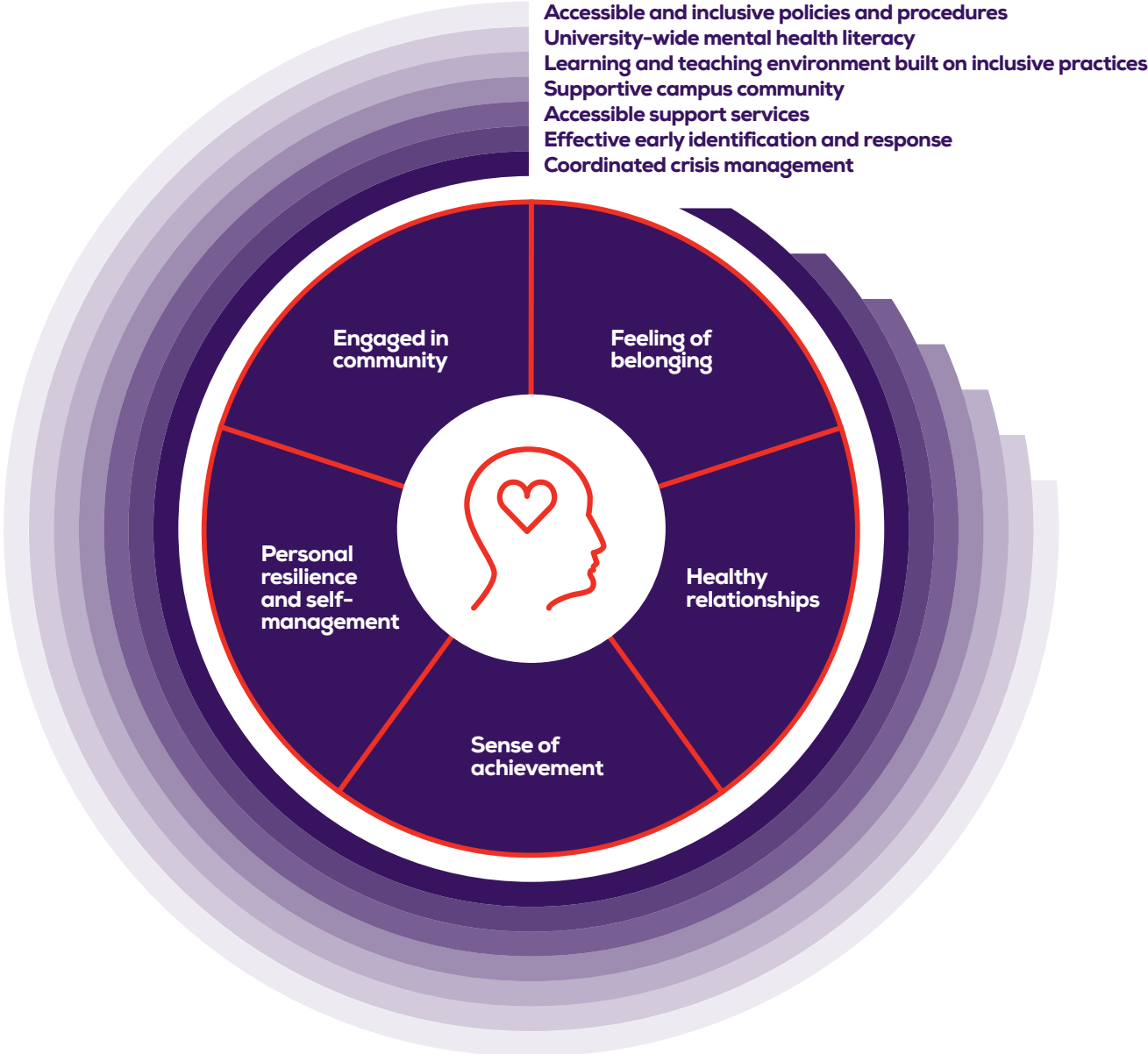


Figure 1. Seven strategies and their five expected outcomes

Strategies to deliver the ACU's Mental Health Framework

ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	ACU has a range of policies and procedures focusing on supporting students with temporary or ongoing mental health conditions and providing appropriate interventions when students are at risk of self-harm or harm to others.
UNIVERSITY-WIDE MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY	Awareness of mental health and wellbeing occurs through the promotion and availability of workshops and training programs provided by Counselling and Disability Service and online resources for students and staff.
LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT BUILT ON INCLUSIVE PRACTICES	Curriculum design and best practice teaching strategies are implemented to promote a learning and teaching environment which is inclusive and enhances student wellbeing.
SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY	Students are given opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to their campus by forming connections with other students, academic staff and the broader University community. Students who study online are given the opportunity to build connections through a virtual environment.
ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT SERVICES	Students with temporary or ongoing mental health conditions or in identified high risk groups are offered targeted programs and where relevant, are supported by the implementation of an Education Inclusion Plan so they can continue with their studies. Staff are aware of the internal and external support services that can be accessed to assist students with mental health conditions and those identified as at risk of self-harm or harm to others.
EFFECTIVE EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND RESPONSE	Early identification of deteriorating mental health is met with appropriate intervention to decrease the likelihood of a progression of mental health difficulties which can often impair a student's ability to complete their course of study.
COORDINATED CRISIS MANAGEMENT	A Critical Incident Management Framework directs staff on how to respond in crisis situations including incidents of self-harm or harm to others.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES



Feeling of belonging



Healthy relationships



Sense of achievement



Personal resilience and self-management



Engaged in community



Implementation Plan



Accessible and inclusive policies and procedures

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Policies and procedures are published on the University public website. These policies include:
 - Assessment Policy and Procedures
 - Code of Conduct for all staff
 - Critical Incident Management Policy
 - Discrimination and Harassment Policy
 - Policy and Procedure on Managing a Student Threatening Self-Harm
 - Serious Student Health Conditions Policy and Procedures
 - Student Complaint Management Policy
 - Student Conduct and Discipline Policy
 - Student Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures
 - Students with Disabilities Policy and Procedures

University-wide mental health literacy

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training will be available to students and staff on all campuses, with programs dedicated to students who are in high-risk groups.
- A range of activities promoting students' resilience and mental health literacy will be delivered on each campus. These include the following:
 - campus events, eg Orientation, Market Days, R U OK Day, Stamp Out Stress Day, World Mental Health Day, Cultural Celebration Day, Healthy Cooking Demonstration, and local competitions
 - embedded programs within some units of study, eg Preparing for placement – teaching, Personal resilience, Advanced group work
 - national and campus (psycho-educational) workshops, eg Mastering exam anxiety, Think before you leave: census time, Get things done, and Mindfulness meditation
 - online resources, eg Exam anxiety quiz, Sleep and your studies, Resilience and wellbeing during placement, and Successful thesis completion
 - My Academic and Personal Plan (MAPP) tool.

Learning and teaching environment built on inclusive practices

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Curriculum will be delivered to support student mental wellbeing by being inclusive of diversity and multiple perspectives.
- Inherent requirements² will be established and available for students in relation to every course.
- Staff will be provided with resources and appropriate physical teaching spaces to assist the promotion of active and collaborative learning.
- Students will receive regular and meaningful feedback on their rate of progression which will enable them to more effectively engage with their learning.
- Staff will have access to resources to assist them with responding to a wide range of concerning classroom situations and disruptive behaviours eg Managing student behaviour modules and Staff referral guide to student services.
- Staff will be informed on the ways in which students with Education Inclusion Plans can be supported in their studies.

² Inherent requirements are the essential components of a course or unit that demonstrate the capabilities, knowledge and skills to achieve the core learning outcomes of the course or unit.

Supportive campus community

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Students will be introduced to their campus and the support programs available to them to experience the University as a place where connections can be made and where they can feel safe, included and part of a community, eg Orientation, Market Days, ACU Games and a range of student events.
- Respectful relationships and safety on campus will continue to be promoted through the University's commitment to the Respect. Now. Always. program.
- Students will be encouraged to download the SafeZone app which can be used to call ACU Security, request first aid, or raise the alarm for emergency help.
- All University staff are committed to supporting students. Information on staff availability is readily accessible to students.
- Support services and programs are available including Counselling and Disability Service; the Academic Skills Unit; Campus Ministry; Indigenous Higher Education Unit; Sports, Health and Wellbeing services; living and learning communities; Student Advocacy services; Student Enrichment events and programs; Peer Assisted Study Sessions; Connect2Uni; Career Development Services; International support services; Student Veterans Support Program and student clubs and societies.
- Supportive academic-student relationships will be promoted to increase students' feeling of belonging, wellbeing and to enhance academic engagement.
- Inclusion and wellbeing are promoted through a variety of student services eg gyms, sporting clubs and societies.
- Alignment of organised sport programs to student health and wellbeing needs.





Accessible support services

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Information on support services is easily accessed on the public website and the Student Portal.
- Accessible processes are available for students with mental health and other conditions to pursue reasonable adjustments for their units of study through the Education Inclusion Plan.
- Medical services are available on the Melbourne and Brisbane campuses. Students on other campuses have access to external medical services situated in close proximity.
- A free counselling service is available to all students. Counsellors are either social workers (Australian Association of Social Workers) or psychologists (Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency). Counsellors have access to agencies and professionals in the community for the referral of students to specialised services.
- Resources and services are provided for the support of students by our Counselling and Disability Service. These include:
 - after-hours counselling service
 - information about external specialised services and agencies
 - recommended apps
 - My Academic and Personal Plan (MAPP) tool
 - workshops and seminars
 - health and wellbeing events
 - online resources.
- Student support is offered through:
 - Campus Ministry and pastoral care programs
 - Indigenous Higher Education Units (IHEU)
 - Accommodation – supported living and learning communities
 - Sports, Health and Wellbeing services
 - International (including 24/7 telephone support)
 - Wellbeing Coordinators for Elite Athlete and Performer Program (EAPP) students.



Effective early identification and response

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Training will be available to inform students and staff of actions to take when students display behaviours that suggest they are at risk of self-harm or harm to others.
- Counselling services will be promoted to staff and students to inform them of the assistance that can be provided to students with temporary or ongoing mental health difficulties.
- Counsellors will make referrals to specialised external professionals and agencies to provide ongoing support to students who have serious mental health conditions.
- Targeted supports and programs are in place for students who are particularly at risk including international students, low socio-economic status (SES), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with a variety of pre-existing medical conditions.
- Preparation is provided to students before travelling overseas on University activities.



Coordinated crisis management

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- Up-to-date, accessible information is available to staff and students on how to respond in crisis situations, including when a student is at risk of self-harm or harm to others. This includes information about assistance that can be provided in a timely manner both to individuals who have raised the concern and to the student who is identified as being at risk.
- Critical Incident Management training will be provided to identified staff on a regular basis.
- A procedural debrief will occur after each critical incident to review that effective processes are in place.
- Processes and protocols are in place for the management of critical incidents when students are abroad.

