

**MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**Introduction**

The mental health and wellbeing of tertiary students is of growing concern across the sector. A number of recently published reports have provided evidence of the need for tertiary education providers to intentionally address the issue of student mental health.

In 2018, the Australian Government endorsed the Higher Education Standards Panel’s Recommendation 8 that confirmed “every institution should have an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan” (Australian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2018).

Eastern acknowledges that good mental health is important to students’ academic success as well as to their general well-being – as it also is for our faculty and staff. With this in mind, and in response to Recommendation 8 of the Higher Education Standards Panel, Eastern has developed a Strategy to provide a sustainable approach to mental health promotion, protection and intervention for all College students and employees.

**Organisational Goals**

In keeping with the stated goals in our current Strategic Plan, Eastern is committed to maintaining a spiritually-vital community with strong Christian values and in particular to provide a supportive student experience where their safety and well-being is assured.

**Mental Health Goals**

Mental health is one of Australia’s nine National Health Priority Areas (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2013) and is of growing concern in our nation.

Mental health is essential to students’ academic success and retention and this Strategy aims to develop and promote an inclusive and supportive community that fosters positive mental health for all stakeholders. While the fundamental challenges students engaging in tertiary education face, coupled with the uncertainty of the employment market cannot be eliminated, appropriate strategies can assist in mitigating these pressures. The Strategy reflects Eastern’s commitment to support and protect students as they seek to achieve their academic potential. This involves three key goals of focus.

**GOAL 1: PROMOTION**

Promote greater awareness of mental health and wellbeing and thereby reduce the stigma associated with mental ill health.

1.1 Provide information resources to build understanding and knowledge of mental health among students and staff.

1.2 Provide and support professional development opportunities for staff that focus on supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing.

**GOAL 2: PROTECTION**

Create and foster a culture of inclusiveness for all students with the purpose of increasing students’ sense of belonging and connection and thereby reducing their risk of developing mental ill health.

2.1 Demonstrate a strategic commitment to integrating an inclusive environment for all students.

2.2 Promote zero tolerance for discrimination against students who have mental ill health by embedding mental health within core policy documents.

2.3 Include in the induction program for staff, education about mental health and strategies for enhancing student mental health and wellbeing.

**GOAL 3: INTERVENTION**

Support students who are experiencing mental ill health or mental health difficulties.

3.1 Adopt practices and create learning environments that increase the opportunities for students to pursue their interests and goals, and which promote a sense of belonging, healthy relationships, autonomy and competence.

3.2 Provide students with appropriate, accessible support services and refer externally where necessary.

**Measures**

The Strategy’s success will be evaluated on the basis of:

an **increase** in:

* The educational outcomes for students with mental ill health
* Student access to support services

and a **reduction** in:

* Student psychological distress
* The proportion of people with mental ill health exiting prior to completing their studies thereby reducing social disadvantage to an already vulnerable group.

**IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION**

The implementation and evaluation of the Strategy will be the responsibility of the Mental Health Working Group. This group will be responsible to monitor the progress achieved in the associated Implementation Plan. The responsibility for the direction of the Strategy will be that of the College Executive. An evaluation and review of the Strategy will occur every two years with the next review to occur at the end of 2021.

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**1. INCLUSIVITY & CONNECTEDNESS**

To build a culture in Eastern’s community that reduces stigma associated with mental health challenges. Ensure students with identifiable mental ill health are referred to and can access mental health services.

**Activities**

* Ensure that members of the Eastern community are aware of anti-discrimination legislation so that students experiencing mental ill health are provided with “reasonable adjustments” where appropriate.
* Review policies to mental health is adequately addressed.
* Support students who are experiencing mental ill health by providing advice about reasonable adjustments to academic staff and negotiating extensions and other adjustments on behalf of the student.
* Promote a culture of student self-advocacy and negotiation at Orientation events, ensuring that referral pathways are clear for students who have pre-existing mental health issues.
* Provide staff with training including recognising, responding and referral actions for students presenting with mental health difficulties.
* Provide information resources to students who require support with mental health issues.
* Provide wellbeing support services that are accessible, equitable, appropriate and effective.

**Measures**

* Number of staff and students who participate in Mental Health First Aid training.
* Number of students and staff who access relevant information resources.
* Number of student support plans that successfully minimise the impact of a student’s physical and/or mental illness and remove barriers to success.
* Review and audit of outcomes post student mental health critical incident.
* Policy, procedures and practices are benchmarked against external organisations
* Number of students who access support services.

**2. RESPONSIVENESS & LITERACY**

Respond to students within a timely manner that also demonstrates consideration of any mental ill health indicators by increasing staff and student access to knowledge of mental health information and training on the nature, impact management and prevention.

**Activities**

* Source and make available materials that can be used to promote positive mental health care and highlight these during Orientation.
* Support R U OK? Day and Mental Health Week to raise awareness in the College community of the prevalence of mental health issues.
* Ensure special consideration policies consider mental health as well as physical health.
* Include anti-discrimination legislation and the requirement to provide reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 in induction training for all staff.
* Through the college website, provide students with mental health resources on prevention and mental health capacity building.
* Raise awareness amongst all staff and students of the enablers of good mental health and ensure easy access to further support and guidance on these enablers. Enablers can include sleep, diet/alcohol, accommodation, finance, sport, physical activity and study skills.
* Support training opportunities on mental health to students and staff.
* Develop clear referral pathways and processes for responding to mental health crisis with the aim of reducing distress, ensuring the safety of those involved.

**Measures**

* Resources promoting positive mental health are available physically and online.
* Web analytics indicate uptake of mental health online resources.
* Explicit teaching guidelines and resources specifically related to potentially distressing curriculum materials are accessible for teaching staff.
* Orientation programs to include the promotion of mental health and support services available to all enrolled students.
* Number of Teaching & Learning staff who access resources that strengthen their knowledge and capacity around mental health.
* Students who are impacted by mental ill health receive timely support.
* This Student Mental Health Strategy is endorsed and promoted.
* Proportion of students who report sense of belonging to the college community.