STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Australian College of Business Intelligence (ACBI) is an environment that encourages an open and nurturing environment that empowers students to learn and further themselves.

The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is designed to support the mental health, safety and wellbeing of its students, staff and affiliates. ACBI is in the process of instilling this strategy and will continue to develop the strategy in the future. We are working to extinguish the social stigma surrounding mental health and normalise the conversation of mental health and wellbeing amongst the ACBI community. This strategy re-engineers the existing systems in place for mental health to provide more proactive and student-centric approaches to ensure student and staff wellbeing.

Every institution should embed a comprehensive mental health strategy and implementation plan that is institution-wide.

Mental health refers to a person's condition with regards to their social, psychological and emotional wellbeing. Different factors can underpin and influence a person's mental health and wellbeing, including the individual, interpersonal, community, structural and institutional circumstances.

This can affect different people in different ways and should become a focal point in student and staff development.
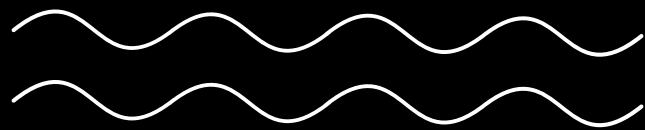
MENTAL HEALTH AMONGST VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

Students Commencing or Transitioning into Vocational Studies

The initial transition into vocational study can be difficult for students due to the pressure of needing to:

- Form new connections
- Increased autonomy and independence
- Balancing study
- Financial responsibility
- Overall change

For international students, students from interstate or students who live in remote and regional areas, progressing to vocational studies may involve moving away from family and pre-existing support systems which may be a difficult change to adjust to.

For some students, the commencement of vocational studies during a period that is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to loneliness due to some classes being delivered online, increased workloads, self-doubt, uncertainty of career choice as well as anxiety and pressure.
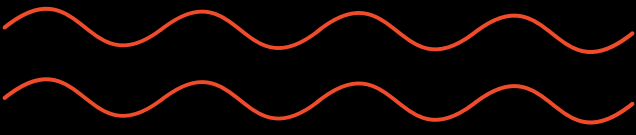
International Students

International students may experience cultural and psychosocial stressors that can be associated with moving to a foreign country, language, culture and lifestyle. Mental health can be addressed differently across different countries and cultures, which may impact the way students handle their mental health in difficult circumstances. It is important that international students are familiar with the mental health and wellbeing options that are available in Australia.

Students Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant change to students. These impacts include:

- Physical health when coming into contact with COVID-19
- Emotional wellbeing as COVID-19 has brought feelings of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, frustration and depression
- Isolation and restrictions such as social distancing and lockdown
- Domestic abuse and coercive control
- Health anxiety
- Financial difficulties such as loss of employment or income
- Work and studying from home
- Border closure

OUR PRINCIPLES

THE ENVIRONMENT

1 **Reduce the social stigma surrounding mental illness and generate better awareness for mental health and wellbeing**

Though mental health awareness has become more prominent, there is still social stigma associated with mental health illnesses. ACBI will actively discuss the importance of mental health and wellbeing and normalise the conversation of mental health.

How will we do this?

- Students are encouraged to talk to student services about their mental health and wellbeing
- Student services will create initiatives with students to understand the student experience and context, such as their lived experience with mental health or their pre-emptive concerns of their mental health
- Mental health and wellbeing initiatives that accommodate and acknowledge the diverging cultures and needs of different students, in particular amongst international students
- Initiatives may include programs or activities targeting:
- Social stigma and normalising mental health conversations
- Develop awareness of student mental health and wellbeing
- Develop an understanding of mental health and wellbeing
- Peer based programs to support each other
- Facilitate students' access to support services

2 Create an inclusive, diverse and supportive environment and culture

Creating an environment that helps build social integration and connectedness for new and existing students is important to support mental wellbeing. ACBI will take action to ensure an inclusive, diverse and supportive environment and culture is curated.

How will we do this?

- Provide students with opportunities to connect and engage with other students
- Instil student equity and social inclusion policies, procedures and plans to combat racism, gender based violence, discrimination, sexism, isolation and exclusion
- Ensure that the curriculum design, teaching and learning environment, classroom culture and activities are inclusive and support student wellbeing and happiness
- Arrange cohesive, engaging and inclusive activities and/or events on the campus and/or online to create a connectedness for students
- Identify student cohorts who face a higher risk of isolation, racism or discrimination and encourage social connection and inclusivity between cohorts
- Ensure that student spaces are accessible for students who may experience limited mobility
- Create a calendar of significant cultural events that celebrate various and diverse cultures and identities
- ACBI will engage in training and guidance for staff that interact with students on how to respond to students who may show indicators of psychological distress or mental health illness

THE EXPERIENCE

3 **Provide mental health and wellbeing practices throughout the student's experience**

Offering students the necessary mental health and wellbeing practices will establish a stable support system throughout their time at ACBI. It is important to promote these practices, activities and initiatives to ensure students are aware of the available help.

How will we do this?

- Processes that require students to obtain a mental health diagnosis or 'proof' of a mental health diagnosis in order to obtain special consideration or reasonable adjustments will acknowledge that there may be barriers for students to acquire a diagnosis of mental health or illness
- Guide students to programs that encourage holistic wellbeing such as emotional, physical, social, mental and spiritual wellbeing
- Offer digital and physical platforms that welcome and enhance wellbeing
- Continue to actively participate in global and national campaigns that promote mental wellbeing such as R U OK? Day and Mental Health Month
- Promote and deliver mental health and awareness events or activities
- Provide access to resources that will build students' knowledge, skills and understanding of mental health and mental wellbeing

4 Proactive approach to student needs and integrated delivery of care

Taking proactive interventions to promote mental wellbeing is important for students to understand the various factors that may positively or negatively impact their mental wellbeing. These interventions will target the mental and physical wellness of students and to help prevent mental health difficulties where possible.

How will we do this?

- Establish formal partnerships and/or collaborate with service providers and/or research centres to curate an integrated system that offers support to young people and empowers them to seek help
- Establish clear internal and external referral pathways for students who are experiencing mental health difficulties
- Provide regular and ongoing mental health and mental wellbeing messages to students across various channels of communication to help stimulate and normalise mental health conversations
- Continue to raise awareness of mental health and mental wellbeing to reduce the stigma and discrimination that can be associated with mental health illnesses
- Review and analyse existing approaches to academic progress to enhance targeted and timely intervention to support students who may show indications of additional support to help them
- Ensure that the curriculum is designed for and accessible to students that come from diverse backgrounds

THE EVALUATION

(5) **The response to mental health and wellbeing is strengthened through collaboration and coordinated actions**

To ensure that our response to mental health and encouraging mental wellbeing is strengthened, it is integral to construct initiatives, events, activities and support systems that benefit students and staff. This can be achieved through collaborative and coordinated actions.

How will we do this?

- Partnerships may be entered into through methods including:
    - Student evaluation
    - Student feedback
    - Student surveys
    - Working groups
    - Focus groups
    - Specific projects
    - Testing and evaluating
- Direct delivery of mental health and wellbeing initiatives
- Explore innovative partnerships with external organisations to help improve mental health and wellbeing for students
- Communicate and engage with students and staff when planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives
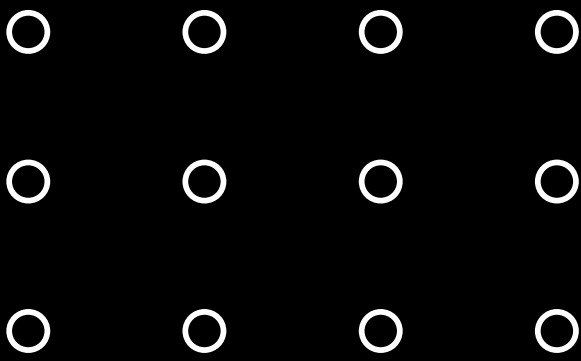
6 — Ongoing evaluation, innovation and improvement on approaches to mental health and wellbeing support

ACBI understands that there is always a way to improve or innovate and is open to evaluating options to do so. Mental health and wellbeing support constantly evolves in nature, meaning our approaches need to be able to adapt.

How will we do this?

- Extract internal expertise amongst students and staff to help identify evidence-informed strategies
- Create staff and student networks to:
- Build relationships
- Share expertise and experiences
- Identify needs and opportunities
- Increase mental health and wellbeing support services
- Internal research about student mental health and wellbeing
- Monitor the use of student mental health resources
- Analyse mental health and wellbeing promotion and education activities or initiatives and their effectiveness
- Collect and evaluate data on the frequency, receptiveness and support of wellbeing services delivered to students