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Victoria University is an open and inclusive university. It is our mission to not only provide outstanding, high quality educational opportunities to any student from any background, but to provide a safe and supportive university environment that ensures student wellbeing and success. The Victoria University Student Mental Health Strategy (2018–2020) provides us with a central framework that clearly illustrates our university-wide commitment to promoting positive student mental health and reducing the stigma associated with mental ill health. The Strategy confirms our shared attitude and commitment to providing an environment that is responsive to students who experience mental ill health, and that provides easy access to a range of services and supports that promote and encourage positive mental health and wellbeing.

The Strategy has been proudly developed by Student Services in consultation with students, staff and the broader University community. I am excited to enact the objectives of the strategy in partnership with our students and staff, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact this strategy will have on our entire community.

Naomi Dempsey

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Acknowledgement of Country

Victoria University acknowledges the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Boonwurrung, Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) and Wathaurung (Wadawurrung) on our Melbourne campuses, and the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation on our Sydney campus. These groups are the custodians of the University land and have been for many centuries. As we share our own knowledge practices within the University may we pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and their ownership of Country. We acknowledge that the land on which our campuses stand is the place of age old ceremonies and celebration, initiation and renewal. The Kulin and Eora people’s living culture had, and has, a unique role in the life of these regions. Victoria University supports the aim of Reconciliation Australia to build better relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the benefit of all Australians. It is important that staff, students and visitors understand and respect the significance of recognizing the traditional owners of University land.

Warning to Indigenous Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this document may contain images or names of deceased persons.
Victoria University (VU) has prioritised the need for a clear vision and direction on the status of student mental health and wellbeing across the institution as demonstrated by the Victoria University Student Mental Health Strategy (2018–2020) (the Strategy). The Strategy aims to provide the strategic direction that will allow VU to proactively invest in the mental health and wellbeing of our students as well as to ensure access to support is available for those students in need.

The vision and commitment of the Strategy is to embed a common approach across the VU community that promotes positive student mental health, reduces stigma associated with mental ill health, creates an environment that is responsive to students who experience mental ill health by ensuring that a range of services, supports and events are provided that promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

The Strategy is enabled by a two-year implementation plan focussed on achieving three goals. This integrated approach forms the foundation of the Strategy.
VU PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

VU’s principles for promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students reflects an integrated approach to taking action across the lifecycle of a VU student, which combines the strengths of promotion, protection and intervention. Four key principles – inclusivity, responsiveness, literacy, and connectedness – will guide the implementation of all mental health and wellbeing objectives as outlined in the Strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. INCLUSIVITY</strong></td>
<td>To build a culture within VU’s community that works towards reducing stigma associated with mental ill health and mental health difficulties.</td>
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<td><strong>2. RESPONSIVENESS</strong></td>
<td>Respond to students within a timely manner that also demonstrates consideration of any mental ill health indicators.</td>
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<td><strong>3. LITERACY</strong></td>
<td>Increase staff and student access to knowledge of mental health including information and training on the nature, impact, management and prevention. Training and information to be extended to include support services both within VU and external (e.g. community based services).</td>
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<td><strong>4. CONNECTEDNESS</strong></td>
<td>Ensure students with identifiable mental ill health are referred to and can access mental health services within VU. Build and continuously improve coordinated access and referral to community based services that specialise in the mental health field.</td>
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STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

OUR VISION
As the University of Opportunity and Success, we will be open and excellent, creating exceptional value for any student from any background and uplifting the communities in which we operate.

OUR MISSION
EDUCATION
Providing high quality, engaging career-based tertiary education at all levels of vocational and higher education with flexible entry and exit points, appropriate pathways, engaging and rigorous curriculum and contemporary delivery; while maintaining rigorous standards and ensuring that all students are supported to meet those standards.

RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT
Victoria University’s Student Mental Health Strategy (2018–2020) is framed by the vision and mission outlined in the VU Strategic Plan (2016–2020) and Transformational Agenda (White Paper) and supports the broader objectives of the VU strategy. The Strategy articulates commitments VU has made to ensure that we are a “university of the 21st century” by being inclusive of all students. There are many highly-regarded mental health initiatives already in place at VU and Universities Australia’s development of a new national university mental health framework will assist us to further respond to the increasing complexity and demand for student mental health support. The Strategy will be assisted by this framework identifying and building on best practice.

Evidence-based data, research outlining best practice, consultations with stakeholders and students have been the guiding principles influencing the design and development of the Strategy. Consultation with staff and students has been undertaken via individual interviews as well as focus groups. Written comment and feedback was also invited from a number of stakeholders throughout the consultation process. Additionally, the Strategy is aligned and adheres to the Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions to facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with a mental illness (University of Melbourne, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, and Australian Rotary Health) and is informed by the World Health Organisations Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO). Furthermore, the Strategy is responsive to the VU CALD community of students and is aligned with both the Cultural Diversity Strategy and the Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy.
DEFINITIONS

MENTAL HEALTH
The World Health Organisation (2014) defines mental health as “a state of [mental] well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her and his community.”

MENTAL ILL HEALTH
Broad term used as an umbrella term that includes both mental health difficulties and mental illness.

MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES
The Australian Department of Health (DoH) (2007) defines a mental health difficulty as something which interferes with how a person thinks, feels, and behaves, but to a lesser degree than a mental illness. A mental health difficulty is usually temporary and is often a reaction to a life stressor. With effective support, mental health difficulties can be resolved. However, in some instances mental health difficulties may develop into a mental illness (ANU, 2016).

MENTAL ILLNESS
One in five Australians are affected by mental ill health (ABS, 2008) The Australian Department of Health describes a mental illness as a health problem that significantly affects a person’s cognitive, social, and emotional functioning. A mental illness is diagnosed according to standardised criteria. The term mental disorder is used to refer to these health problems. There are over 200 recognised mental disorders including depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance abuse (ANU, 2016).

RESILIENCE
Describes the capacity to cope, adapt and grow in the face of stress or adversity. Further to this, resilience for the purpose of this strategy will adopt Lizzio’s (2006) Five Senses of Success framework. According to Lizzio (2006) the five areas of student need are proposed as relevant to their early success at tertiary education. The five areas are:

- capability
- connectedness
- purpose
- resourcefulness
- academic culture.
The mental health and wellbeing of students is gaining increased attention across the sector. This follows a number of published reports that evidence the need for tertiary education to seriously and with intent, address the issue of student mental health across its organisations. In 2017 Orygen released a report titled “Under the Radar” which offered a conservative estimate that upwards of 210,000 Australian university students aged 18 to 25 years would experience mental ill health. Whilst this report specifically referenced university students it is assumed from other research (Headspace, 2016) that vocational students are not immune to the same stresses and risks in regards to their mental health as those that their university counterparts experience.

In September 2018, Universities Australia announced that it would work with specialists and experts on a new national university mental health framework, assisted by Federal Government funding. This was following the Australian Government’s endorsement of 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).

In support of this recommendation, VU has developed the Strategy to provide a sustainable approach to mental health promotion, protection and intervention for all students.

THE VU CONTEXT

By adopting a whole of university approach, VU is articulating the collaboration required between all areas of the university and promotes greater awareness of mental health for all VU students. Growing research in the field of mental health places increasing importance on the role that leadership plays in setting the tone for mental health and wellbeing throughout an organisation. Therefore, a Student Mental Health Strategy Reference Group has been established to include leaders of VU, both staff and student representatives. This sets the tone for VU to establish clearer expectations regarding promotion of mental health and wellbeing and appropriate responses to mental ill health across the University.

In the development of the strategy, stakeholders including students were asked what impact mental health had on the student experience, how it impacts on academic performance and retention, what VU can do better and what VU already does that works. Stakeholders were also asked what positive mental health and wellbeing looks like.

In interviews and focus groups conducted to develop the Strategy the themes below were identified. These themes have guided the development of the Strategy including the principles in which it is based.

- Stakeholders expressed a need for VU to strengthen capability around early detection and intervention of mental ill health.
- The historical and ongoing community stigma associated with mental ill health can be a barrier for students to seek support.
- Actions to address mental health are difficult to capture from statistical data with VU in an ideal position to take a more innovative approach to using our data to determine service design.
- Feedback revealed that a whole of University approach to mental health will contribute to a more seamless referral journey for students seeking support.

VU is committed to a mental health strategy with measurable targets that also creates a forum for ongoing discussion, actively working to reduce stigma and to provide a proactive process that supports students.
Mental health is one of Australia’s nine National Health Priority Areas (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2013) and is a major problem affecting young people aged between 15 and 24 years. The Australian census data indicates that at least one in four young people in this age group will experience mental ill health in any one year. Of greater concern is the current rate of young people dying of suicide annually. In the 2016 census data it was reported that 403 young people died by suicide in that year. This is more than one young person every day, making suicide the leading cause of death for young Australians. History or experience of mental health conditions are known to be significant risk factors for suicide.

Mental health is essential to students’ academic success and retention. Studies have found that mental health problems were shown to put Australian university students at risk of both short and long term consequences, including disrupted studies, early course exiting and difficulty entering into the workforce (Stallman, 2010). Although mental ill health can have significant negative impacts on the student experience, completion rates and academic performance, Orygen Youth Research Centre (2014) identified that successful participation in tertiary education (both in completion and experience of being well supported) can be a protective factor for mental health and a key element of the psychosocial recovery process.

The Strategy aims to develop and promote an inclusive and supportive community that fosters positive mental health for all students. To do this, the Strategy identifies and maps how we can meet the challenges of the 21st century student who will navigate an increasingly globally mobile and agile world. The inherent stressors for students engaging in tertiary education, coupled with the uncertain and challenging employment market cannot be eliminated by VU, but can be mitigated with the appropriate strategy in place. The Strategy reflects the University’s commitment to support and protect students’ right 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 Foster critical conversations about mental health through targeted reference groups including both staff and students that lead to improve policies, programs, and practices.

1.2 Provide information resources on a range of channels, supported by training that challenges inaccurate stereotypes about mental ill health.

1.3 Support an ongoing program of high-quality activities and events to build understanding and knowledge of mental health among students and staff.

1.4 Provide 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. Increasing students’ sense of belonging and connection and reducing their risk of developing mental ill health.

2.1 Demonstrate a high-level strategic commitment to integrating a whole of VU approach to create an inclusive environment for all students.

2.2 Embed mental health within core policy documents, including institutional strategic and business plans.
Promote zero tolerance for discrimination against students who have mental ill health.

2.3 Develop an induction program for staff that includes 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 support services that are high-quality, well resourced, and accessible.
MEASURES

The Strategy will implement an outcomes focus with measurable targets crucial to determining its impact. Targets are informed by research and consultation with relevant stakeholders, including students. Each has been influenced by the three goals: promotion, protection and intervention. The targets will be further developed and documented in the operational plan that will be monitored and implemented by the Student Mental Health Reference Group. The Strategy sets out the following targets as key indicators of success.

INCREASE
- Student participation and engagement
- The educational outcomes for students with mental ill health
- Student access to support services

DECREASE
- Student psychological distress
- Stigma
- 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 Student Mental Health Working Group. This group consists of key stakeholders including staff and students to discuss the progress achieved in the associated Operational Plan.

The responsibility for the direction of the Strategy will be that of the Student Mental Health Reference Group. This group consists of key leaders at VU and includes both staff and students. The Reference Group will meet biannually to ensure the strategic direction continues to be aligned to the broader VU Strategy and that the goals are being achieved.

An evaluation and review of the Strategy will occur every two years with the next review to occur at the end of 2020.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VU would like to recognise and thank the following sources as influenced in the development of this strategy:

- University of Melbourne Mental Health Strategy (2016–2018)
- The Australian National University Mental Health Strategy (2016)
- Guidelines for Tertiary Education Institutions: To facilitate improved educational outcomes for students with a mental illness (The University of Melbourne, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, and Australian Rotary Health).
- World Health Organisation – Mental Health
- The University of Western Sydney Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012–2015
Victoria University would like to recognise and thank the following people for contributing to the Strategy:

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- Alexandra Parker, Professorial Research Fellow, Institute for Health and Sport
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- Anthony Long, Associate Director International Relations
- Belinda Gibson, Manager Counselling & Accessibility Services
- Danielle Borlovan, Student Transition Mentor Officer
- Elli Darwinkel, Senior Coordinator Safer Community
- Hannah Nadin, Student
- James Charles, Student
- James Goring, Student and 21st Century Skills, Project Officer
- James Nightingale, Director VU Sport and Health
- Jasmine Birch, Student
- Jen Anderson, Senior Coordinator Accessibility Services
- Jo van Son, Director, Centre for Student Success
- Karen Jackson, Director Moondani Balluk
- Leigh Edwards, Manager Pathways, Transition and Retention
- Leon Kerr, Associate Director Student Advisory and Customer Service
- Margaret Dawson, Associate Director, Foundation and Diploma Programs
- Naomi Dempsey, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)
- Norbert Kindermann, Student
- Scott Murray, Retention Officer, Centre Career Development and Employment.
- Shannyn Cain, Coordinator Student Life and Leadership
- Temi Oladiji, Student
- Teresa De Fazio, Manager Cultural Diversity
- Tessa Benson, Learning Hub Manager
- Tim Reinders, Senior Manager Occupational Health and Safety
- Trish McCluskey, Director Connected Learning
- Yvonne Rolley, Associate Director, Student Life & Wellbeing
REFERENCE LIST


IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. INCLUSIVITY

To build a culture within VU’s community that works towards reducing stigma associated with mental ill health and mental health difficulties.

ACTIVITIES

• Ensure that members of VU community are aware of anti-discrimination legislation so that students experiencing mental ill health or mental health difficulties are provided with “reasonable adjustments” where appropriate.

• Review VU policies that relate to mental health and evaluate the efficacy in helping students with mental health issues and staff in support of such students.

• Review, develop and implement VU policies and procedures that promote social equity and equality of opportunity by including and considering the needs of students with mental ill health or experiencing mental health difficulties.

• Monitor application of VU’s Accessibility Action Plan (2016–2020) to raise awareness of mental health and disability issues across the VU community.

• Develop a promotional campaign focussed on equality of opportunity for students with mental ill health and mental health difficulties.

• 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.

• Engage respectful inclusive curricula with clear progression pathways and easy access to support services.

MEASURES

• Number of staff and students who participate in Mental Health First Aid training.

• Number of students participating in mental health awareness campaigns.

• Number of students and staff who access self-help tools.

• Number of access plans that successfully minimise the impact of a student’s physical and/or mental illness and remove barriers to success.

• Increased awareness among students of VU’s Student Accessibility Action Plan (2016–2020) via student accessible channels.

• Review and audit of outcomes post student mental health critical incident.

• Policy, procedures and practices are benchmarked against external organisations.
2. RESPONSIVENESS

Respond to students within a timely manner that also demonstrates consideration of any mental ill health indicators.

ACTIVITIES

- Develop materials that can be used to promote positive mental health and mental health care that can be used in recruitment, on-boarding, pre-arrival activities and orientation programs.
- Build initiatives and activities that will be delivered during orientation programs.
- Embed mental health messages into key activities such as Family Information Day, O-Fest and international student events.
- Support annual campaigns to raise awareness in the VU community of the prevalence of mental health issues, include activities to reduce the stigma associated with talking about or disclosing mental health difficulties e.g. R U OK? Day, Mental Health Week.
- 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 Education Standards 2005 in online induction training modules for all staff at VU.
- Through the VU website, provide students with mental health resources on prevention and capacity building.
- Provide online tools, modules, webinars and applications customised to local student experience on the VU website.
- Develop, maintain and enhance online mental health self-help resources including modules webinars/audio podcasts.

MEASURES

- Resources promoting positive mental health are available online.
- Visual resources promoting wellbeing are located in strategic locations.
- Web analytics indicate strong 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 university support services available to all enrolled students.
Increase staff and student access to knowledge of mental health information and training on the nature, impact management and prevention. Training and information to be extended to include support services both within VU and external (e.g. community based services).

3. LITERACY

ACTIVITIES

- 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.

- Provide information about student wellbeing as part of new staff induction.

- Develop and implement a communication plan to deliver messages to students about good mental health.

- Teaching & Learning staff to implement inclusive teaching practices.

- Support training opportunities on mental health to VU students and staff e.g. MHFA.

- Develop and maintain strong collaborative relationships between Colleges and Student Support Service staff.

- Maintain and enhance information about the availability of resources and support for members of the VU community.

- Develop a plan to engage with stakeholders including staff and students to develop and monitor a Student Mental Health Strategy for VU.

- Review/develop guidelines that facilitate return to study after an approved absence that relates to mental ill health or mental health difficulties.

- Promote and distribute information about support available for students experiencing mental ill health or mental health difficulties.

- Facilitate reasonable adjustments for students with mental ill health who are registered with Accessibility Services and in cooperation with academic colleges.

- Develop clear referral pathways and processes for responding to mental health crisis with the aim of reducing distress and ensuring the safety of those involved.

- Monitor support services to ensure adequate resources are available to meet demand.
MEASURES

- Number of Teaching & Learning staff who access resources that strengthen their knowledge and capacity around mental health.
- Number of online mental health self-help resources including modules webinars/audio podcasts accessed.
- Student Wellbeing Service delivers a minimum of four MHFA training sessions per year to students and staff. Proportion of staff attending these sessions to be a measure of success.
- Establish ‘MHFA Officers’ in the workplace as a point of contact for staff working with students who are identified or at risk of mental ill health.
- Online resource bank updated annually.
- Proportion of positive student feedback in Annual Survey.
- Students who are impacted by mental ill health receive timely support from the Students Portfolio of Services.
- All enrolled VU students have access to confidential and appropriate student support services including individual face-to-face, telephone and video counselling.
- VU’s Accessibility Action Plan (2016–2020) is endorsed and promoted across the VU community.
- VU’s Student Mental Health Strategy (2018–2020) is endorsed and promoted across the VU community.
- Proportion of students who report sense of belonging to VU community.
Ensure students with identifiable mental ill health are referred to and can access mental health services within the University. This requires internal student support services to be adequately resourced. Build on and continuously improve coordinated access and referral to community based services that specialise in the mental health field.

4. CONNECTEDNESS

ACTIVITIES
- During student recruitment, onboarding and pre-arrival, ensure that referral pathways to support services are clear for students who have pre-existing mental health issues.
- Review and strengthen operational links between VU and specialist services such as Headspace, Orygen, WCASA including mechanisms and protocols.
- Provide staff with training including recognising, responding and referral actions for students presenting with mental ill health and or mental health difficulties.
- Enhance the quality and accessibility of information to students who require support with mental health issues.
- Provide high quality wellbeing support services that are accessible, equitable, appropriate and effective.
- Collect data and evaluate the accessibility and quality of mental health support services.
- Involve students in the review and evaluation of services.

MEASURES
- Student evaluations of support services inform planning.
- Number of students who report awareness of services.
- Proportion of students reporting positive feedback on quality of student support services.
- Average wait time for student support services is within a timely period as per best practice standards.