MENTAL HEALTH **PLAN**

2022–2025

CONTENTS

OBJECTIVES

ACN's Mental Health Strategic Plan was developed to support staff, students and members, and to promote a safe and healthy work and study environment.

ACN has identified four strategic objectives for its Mental Health Strategic Plan.

1 Promote good mental wellbeing and mental health literacy

2 Reduce stigma and facilitate open conversation

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

3 Cultivate respect and inclusion

4 Establish preventative programs and support services

BACKGROUND

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is a professional membership organisation. It provides a national voice for the nursing profession through policy, advocacy, and education activities that aim to advance the status, recognition, and respect for nurses and enhance the health and healthcare of all Australians. Therefore, ACN must adhere to its ethical and moral obligations to directly and indirectly support its members, staff and students to maintain optimal mental health.

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a fundamental human right and a "state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community." (WHO, 2022). Estimates suggest that approximately 20% of Australians have a mental or behavioural condition, with the incidence higher among women (22%) than men (18%). Nursing as a profession consists of a predominantly female workforce and includes those from overseas and those working in rural and remote areas.

The highest proportion of mental health conditions are seen in 15-24-year-olds (26%), when many individuals embark upon or are engaged in secondary and tertiary education (AIHW, 2020). Klepac Pogrmilovic and colleagues (2021) suggest that 1:4 Australian tertiary education students experience sub-optimal mental ill-health. The risk increases for students with pre-existing vulnerability due to their socioeconomic status, sexuality, First Nations heritage, or cultural background. International students and those living in rural and remote settings face unique challenges that increase the possibility of poor mental health. While only a small proportion of ACN staff, students and members fall into the 15-24-year-old bracket, many ACN members, staff, and students originate from these other demographic groups and may be more likely to experience mental ill-health impairment.

The mental health outcomes of at-risk groups are enhanced by information provision, learning opportunities, safe, competent, confidential treatment availability, and the development of "service help-seeking attitudes, awareness, or attitudes toward mental health" (Klepac Pogrmilovic et al., 2021). With specific reference to student well-being, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA, n.d.) summarises an education provider's obligations toward student safety and well-being as 1) providing safe learning environments, 2) support services, and 3) formal complaint handling. TEQSA (n.d.) endorses the availability of clear communication and referral pathways, regularly reminding students and staff about where to find help, the importance of digital well-being, and healthy relationships.

ACN strengthens the mental health and well-being of its fellows, members, staff, and students by providing internal staff training, regularly reviewing and updating policies and procedures, providing staff recognition awards, increasing the accessibility of counselling services, and promoting diversity and cultural safety.

RESPONSIBILITIES

As a provider of education and professional body for nurses, ACN's responsibility to mental well-being is magnified. ACN is also responsible for workforce sustainability through advocacy and education programs, and recognises that mental health challenges among students, staff, healthcare workers and the wider community are increasingly complex and prevalent. This impacts students in their studies and nurses in the workplace, and ultimately affects the quality of both healthcare and education in Australia. If we cannot engage and support nurses in their early career, it will be more challenging to engage them in the workforce long-term. Moreover, ACN recognises that its power is its people and that a high-performing team is dependent on a work environment that is safe and supportive. We thus commit to taking a whole-of-institution approach to mental health and wellbeing.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Expected outcomes for ACN members, staff, and students of ACN's Mental Health Strategic Plan include:

- Increased personal and organisational resilience

- Better working relationships

- Stronger sense of belonging

- Improved sense of autonomy

- Increased awareness (self and others)

- Stronger sense of achievement and accomplishment

- Greater student success

- Higher staff and student retention

- Stronger working relationships

- Improved support for emerging leaders

- Culturally safe workplaces

- Reduced discrimination

- Stronger engagement with community

- Better equipped nurses who can support mental wellbeing in their practice

These outcomes are applicable to ACN members, staff and students.

ACN'S STRATEGIC PILLARS

The development and implementation of ACN's Mental Health Strategic Plan is integral to ACN's mission and its six strategic pillars. The six pillars underpin the strategic priorities and values of ACN as a for-purpose organisation, and our core belief that individually we are powerful and together we are unstoppable.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

ACN's operational plan is mapped to the objectives of the mental health strategy and strategic pillars, outlined above. The plan aims to address the mental health and wellbeing of students, members and staff, although some initiatives may attend more specifically to one or two of these groups.

OBJECTIVE 1
PROMOTE WELLBEING AND LITERACY

Ref	Description	Strategic pillar	Expected outcome	Who
W1	Foster sense of achievement and value	Community	Increased resilience; stronger retention; better working relationship; greater student success; stronger sense of accomplishment.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
W2	Involve workforce in mental health promotion initiatives	Community Education Leadership	Stronger engagement with community; increased resilience; stronger sense of achievement and accomplishment; stronger sense of belonging.	☐ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
W3	Online resources about resilience	Education	Stronger engagement with community; increased resilience; reduced stigma around mental wellbeing.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
W4	Online resources about being on placement, managing assessment stress	Education	Higher student completion rates; increased resilience; greater sense of autonomy.	☑ Students ☐ Members ☐ Staff
W5	Online training on bullying	Education Community Social impact	Stronger engagement with community; increased resilience; better equipped nurses who can support mental wellbeing in their practice; improved support for emerging leaders; culturally safe workplaces.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
W6	Online tutorials on sexual assault, sexual harassment, and responding to disclosures	Education Social impact Policy	Stronger engagement with community; increased resilience; better equipped nurses who can support mental wellbeing in their practice; improved support for emerging leaders; higher retention rates.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
W7	Support students, nurses and staff to achieve good mental health strategies and outcomes	Social impact	Stronger engagement with community; increased resilience; better equipped nurses who can support mental wellbeing in their practice; improved support for emerging leaders; higher retention rates; improved sense of autonomy; increased awareness (self and others).	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff

REDUCE STIGMA AND OPEN CONVERSATION

Ref	Description	Strategic pillar	Expected outcome	Who
O1	Messaging about mental health at onboarding	Community Social impact	Increased awareness amongst the team about the stigma associated with mental health and how to encourage open conversations; reduced discrimination.	☐ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
O2	Support and encourage conversations about mental health and create the safety to do so	Community Education Leadership	Consistent messaging across all divisions reducing stigma; instigating conversations with staff, members and students.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
O3	Support students, nurses and staff to achieve good mental health strategies and outcomes	Community Education Leadership	Creating a safe environment to discuss support need to achieve mental health strategies; empowering stakeholders to lead in this space; supporting emerging leaders; increased resilience.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
O4	Publish position statements and white papers that address topics concerning the mental health of nurses	Policy	Consistent messaging across all divisions reducing stigma; instigating conversations with staff, members and students; better equip nurses to support mental health and wellbeing in their practice.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
O5	Leadership team is committed to supporting mental wellbeing	Leadership	Role modelling of behaviours to reduce stigma and how to have open conversations; improved support for emerging leaders; culturally safe workplaces; reduced discrimination.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff

RESPECT AND INCLUSION

Ref	Description	Strategic pillar	Expected outcome	Who
R1	Actively promote inclusion and diversity	Community Education Leadership	Create a safe environment where a culturally safe environment reduces discrimination and micro challenge aggression.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
R2	Accessible and inclusive policies	Policy	Consistent messaging across all divisions about inclusion and diversity.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
R3	Accessible and inclusive technologies	Community Policy	Accessible technology; strive for universal design to ensure maximum participation	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
R4	Teaching and learning environment and content is inclusive and culturally safe	Education	Create a safe environment where a culturally safe environment reduces discrimination and micro challenge aggression.	☑ Students ☐ Members ☐ Staff
R5	Increase sense of belonging to ACN and the nursing profession	Leadership	Consistent messaging across all divisions about inclusion and diversity.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
R6	Increase sense of community among both staff, members and students	Community Social Impact	Create a safe environment where we challenge micro-aggressions and discrimination.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
R7	Leadership team is committed to supporting inclusion	Leadership Social Impact Advocacy	Role modelling of behaviours to that include respect and inclusion; improved support for emerging leaders; culturally safe workplaces; stronger sense of belonging.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff

PREVENTION AND SUPPORT

Ref	Description	Strategic pillar	Expected outcome	Who
S1	Provisions for mental health support	Policy Community Leadership	Updated website and intranet highlighting what services are available; using nurse strong neo and CNnect to share a global message; higher completion rates for students or lower attrition rates for students.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
S2	Policies that are up-to-date, regularly reviewed and readily available	Leadership Policy	Increased awareness amongst the team that policies reflect best practice.	☑ Students ☐ Members ☑ Staff
S3	Be agile in attending to workload allocation	Leadership Policy	Higher retention; stronger sense of achievement and competence.	☑ Students ☐ Members ☐ Staff
S4	Preventative programs to target those at risk.	Policy Education Leadership	Increased resilience; higher retention; stronger engagement with community; greater student success; increased sense of awareness (self and others).	☑ Students ☐ Members ☐ Staff
S5	Build and support strong emerging leaders	Leadership	Increased resilience; improved support for emerging leaders; stronger sense of autonomy; better equipped nurses who can support mental wellbeing in the workplace.	☐ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
S6	Student support for managing assessments	Education	Higher retention; greater student success; stronger sense of achievement and competence; improved sense of autonomy.	☑ Students ☐ Members ☑ Staff
S7	Support students to complete their study	Education	Higher retention; greater student success; stronger sense of achievement and competence.	☑ Students ☑ Members ☑ Staff
S8	Train and support ACN's frontline to speak with difficult people	Education Community Policy Leadership	Increased resilience; stronger engagement with community; improved support for emerging leaders; improved sense of autonomy; culturally safe workplaces; reduced discrimination.	☐ Students ☐ Members ☑ Staff

REFERENCES

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020, July 23). *Mental health*. AIHW.
  https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health

Higher Education Standards Panel. (2018). *Improving retention, completion and
  success in higher education*. Australian Government Department of Education
  and Training. https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/
  higher-education-standards-panel-final-report-improving-retention-completion-and-success-higher

Klepac Pogrmilovic, B., Craike, M., Pascoe, M., Dash, S., Parker, A., Calder, R. 2021. *Improving the mental
  health of young people in tertiary education settings. Policy evidence brief 2021-01*. Mitchell Institute,
  Victoria University. https://doi.org/10.26196/bat2- 0676

Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (n.d.). How does TEQSA respond to sector-wide issues? TEQSA.
  https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-does-teqsa-respond-sector-wide-issues

World Health Organization (2022, June 17). *Mental health: strengthening our response*.
  WHO. https://wwwwho.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response.