

JCU Mental Health and Wellness Strategy 2022–2026



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Our commitment to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

At James Cook University we acknowledge with respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the first people, educators and innovators of this Country. We acknowledge that the Country was never ceded, and value the accumulation of knowledge and traditions that reflect the wisdom of ancestral lines going back some 60,000 years, and recognise the significance of this in the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are custodians of Country.

As a University, we will continue to learn ways to care for and be responsible for Country, and we will collectively seek to build a future that is based on truth-telling, mutual understanding, hope, empowerment, and self-determination.



**RESPECT.
NOW.
ALWAYS.**

James Cook University values and celebrates the diversity of our community, and is committed to ensuring our learning and working environment is safe and welcoming.

JCU is proud to be part of the Respect. Now. Always. campaign – a national initiative led by Universities Australia to highlight our determination to ensure our students and staff are safe from discrimination and sexual harassment. Further information about the campaign and free services available for students can be found at jcu.edu.au/sew



Introduction

James Cook University (JCU) is dedicated to creating a brighter future for life in the Tropics worldwide, through graduates and discoveries that make a difference.

The University is committed to enhancing student access, participation and success in higher education and embracing the diversity of the communities we serve. We acknowledge our responsibility to support mental health and wellness as part of our core business.

The James Cook University Mental Health and Wellness Strategy 2022-2026, has been proudly developed in collaboration with students and staff and the wider community.

The Strategy focuses on enhancing the mental health and wellness of our students and staff. It takes an integrated and stepped care approach that is underpinned by diversity, respect and reconciliation, cultural appropriateness, agency, sustainability, and connection with our community.

Through our Mental Health and Wellness Strategy, JCU seeks to create respectful and inclusive environments and activities that promote and protect student and staff mental health and wellness, and respond appropriately when emotional wellbeing may be at risk, and in critical incidents.

Message from the Vice Chancellor

JCU is a University that values our people, place, education, and research.

Mental health and wellness is embedded in our curriculum, our work, our actions, and our supports.

We recognise many factors and influences in achieving good mental health. Our integrated approach to mental health and wellbeing seeks to raise awareness and reduce stigma, address mental ill health regardless of cause, prevent harm by addressing risk factors in the learning and work environment, and clearly articulate the supports available to students and staff when they need it.

The Mental Health and Wellness Strategy 2022-2026, sets out JCU's commitment to implement immediate, medium, and long-term actions that respond to identified gaps and needs to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of our students and staff, and provide a safe, inclusive and respectful work and learning community.

This Strategy assures that mental health is included as a key priority in decision making at JCU.



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "S Biggs". The signature is stylized and enclosed in a circular flourish.

Professor Simon Biggs
Vice Chancellor and President

Background

Mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. Mental health is crucial to personal, community, and socio-economic development (World Health Organisation, 2022).

The JCU Mental Health and Wellness Strategy is evidence-based in drawing from research, including the findings of the Productivity Commission, Mental Health, Inquiry Report (Australian Government, 2020), and the National Mental Health Commission's (NMHC) 2021 National Report (2022). It aligns with the six principles that support student mental health and wellbeing outlined in the Australian University Mental Health Framework (Orygen, 2020).

Poor mental health and suicide remain significant public health issues (NMHC, National Report, 2021). Almost half of the Australian population experiences a mental illness during their lifetime, and there is strong and expanding evidence that university students have poorer mental health than the general population. They experience "heightened psychological distress, in part due to academic and financial pressures, isolation, loneliness, and poor self-care" (Browne et al., 2017, p.51).

"Students who develop mental ill-health are more likely to exit courses early, having a detrimental impact on both their educational and career pathways, as well as their longer term mental and physical health outcomes" (Orygen, 2020, p.3).

The National Mental Health Commission's National Report 2021 draws our focused attention to preventive mental health approaches and suicide prevention systems. The Commission found that 30 per cent of people aged 18 to 24 - the typical age for university students - had high and very high levels of psychological distress (NMHC, National Report, 2022, p. 17).

Suicide was the leading cause of death for this age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The Mental Health, Inquiry Report (Australian Government, 2020, p. 292) highlights the impact of mental ill-health on student outcomes, including:

- Difficulty concentrating and studying, missing classes, and disruptions to participation.
- Perceived and actual stigma, discrimination, and fear of failure.
- Associated impact on finances, employment, and physical ill-health.

Cohorts at greater risk of mental ill-health include students transitioning to university, young students and staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQIA+ people, and those who are experiencing a disability (Australian Government, 2020). There are additional factors that increase the risk of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and others from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds developing mental ill-health. These factors include the stress of moving away from home and support networks, and difficulties when adjusting to new cultures (Universities Australia, 2020).

The following criteria were key to the development of the JCU Mental Health and Wellness Strategy (2022-2026):

- Co-design and development with students and staff.
- Diversity, inclusion, and respect at the heart of the document.
- Whole-of-institution approach.
- Captures the learning environment and curriculum.
- Leverages partnerships, works with organisations, and connects with community services.
- Takes a strengths-based and stepped care approach – from health and wellness promotion to crisis intervention.
- Realistic, timely, and achievable (with due consideration for resourcing, and capability).



Strategy

Strategy

The JCU Mental Health and Wellness Strategy is an integrated model which:

- Recognises diversity, voice, and reconciliation.
- Develops student and staff agency.
- Supports actions and commitments that are culturally informed, sustainable, and connected to community.

Promote

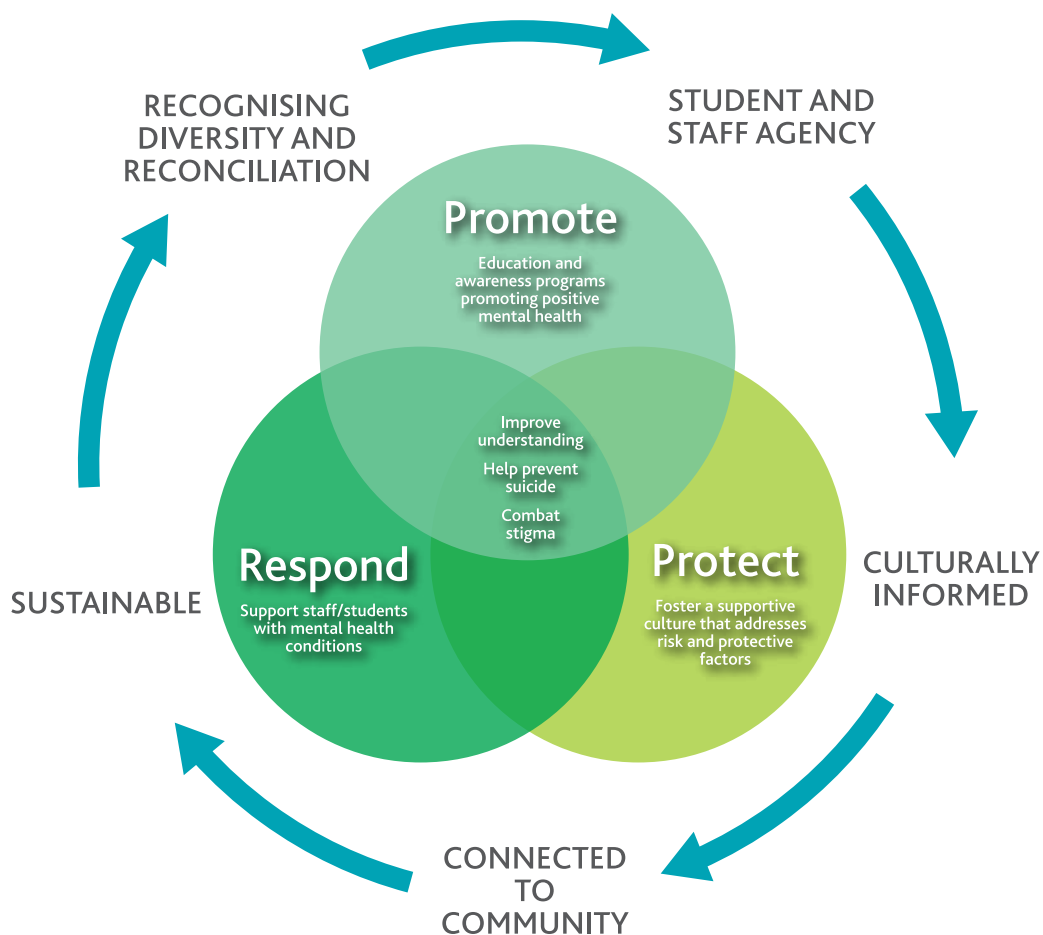
Provide education and policy, early recognition and action, promote self-care, and support help-seeking behaviours and capacity building for positive mental health.

Protect

Foster a supportive and inclusive culture and environment addressing bullying and risks of suicide/harm while increasing protective factors to combat stigma and support positive mental health.

Respond

Provide access to health and wellness support and resources that are flexible and intentional, and offer timely and respectful crisis responses.



Domains

Domains

To deliver on this strategy, JCU has articulated four domains of activity:

1. Learn

Promoting a nurturing and positive stigma-free environment

2. Work

Promoting health and wellness in workplaces and spaces

3. Live

Promoting strengths-based, early recognition and action, evidence-based responses, and positive engagement

4. Support

Promoting partnerships, collaboration, and engagement with community



Implementation and Success

Implementation

Providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment is the responsibility of all members of the JCU community. The University Executive and the senior leadership team have responsibilities in delivering the actions identified in the Strategy and ensuring its success.

A Mental Health Taskforce has been established to monitor the development and delivery of implementation activities. This Taskforce comprises members of the Steering Committee responsible for the development of the Strategy.

Regular monitoring, evaluation, and reporting to the relevant management and governance committees will be undertaken.

Success

In delivering the University's Mental Health and Wellness Strategy, the following commitments are made to ensure the success of the Strategy:

- Visible leadership
- Fit-for-purpose University policies and procedures
- Fit-for-purpose venues and spaces
- Mental health and wellness embedded in the curriculum
- Effective awareness and communication
- Effective resources and help-seeking behaviours
- Increased partnerships and activities
- Student-led and priority group initiatives.

Integrated Domains and Actions

Learn

Promote:	Protect:	Respond:	Success Indicators:
<p>Curriculum and policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide student support workshops and services which are embedded and promoted within the curriculum. • Expand discipline content to focus on mental health and wellness outcomes for students. • Release academic results in business hours to ensure support services are available. • Review course policies and practices to assure choice and flexibility of offerings. • Review policies and procedures to better promote mental health and wellness. <p>Self-care and belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and resources about the signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions and suicide risk, self-care advice, positive coping strategies and resilience (e.g., support around accommodation, harassment, grief, relationships, homesickness, loneliness). • Promote a range of internal and external mental health support options (e.g., student counselling, community support, and organisations such as Headspace and Beyond Blue). 	<p>Learning communities and environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen transition experiences for commencing students. • Expand mentor and peer support programs. • Strengthen on-campus and virtual student engagement events. • Sustain the Multifaith chaplaincy. • Establish rainbow lounges. <p>Increase mental health literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide online and on campus training and workshops including stress management modules, Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK suicide prevention, and campaigns such as R U OK? Day. <p>Policy and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Fitness to Study, Fitness to Practice and other policies and procedures to support mental health and wellness. • Assure existing policies and procedures meet the needs of students who are experiencing psychological distress or mental illness. <p>Early recognition and action for students requiring support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add mental health and wellness actions to all relevant plans and processes, and monitor students who have been admitted to hospital following a mental health crisis. 	<p>Clarity of role of academic and support staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the skills and knowledge required to identify and respond to students displaying early signs of both psychological distress and mental illness. • Create staff support strategies such as debriefs and notification processes. <p>Inclusion for student engagement in studies (accessibility)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to students who are experiencing a disability, medical, or mental health condition to help them participate productively and independently in their studies. • Assure Access Plans are negotiated with students and support staff to incorporate reasonable adjustments. <p>Quality psychological counselling services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain free face-to-face counselling services from qualified counsellors and psychologists. <p>Diversity and priority groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide co-designed health and wellness initiatives for Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, international students, first-year students, and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visibility and engagement with mental health and wellness in student-facing policies and procedures. • Increase in access to data demonstrating help-seeking behaviours, early identification, and action. • Integration of mental health and wellness content in curriculum. • Student and staff participation in training and workshops to develop protective factors. • Increase in priority group mental health and wellness programs, activities, and actions.

Work

Promote:	Protect:	Respond:	Success Indicators:
<p>Mentally healthy workplaces and an ethic of care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build mental health and wellness awareness into staff Professional Development Plans (PDP). Champion open conversations. Expand mental health literacy and wellness training to include help-seeking behaviours and referral. Train line managers and research supervisors to promote mental health and wellness, and support early recognition and action processes. <p>Staff supporting students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information and resources about the signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions and suicide risk, self-care advice, positive coping strategies and resilience (e.g., about accommodation, harassment, grief, relationships, homesickness, loneliness). Promote a range of internal and external mental health support options, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and services (such as Headspace and Beyond Blue). Ensure all students are aware of the policies and systems in place to address discrimination, bullying, making a complaint etc. 	<p>Staff awareness of supporting students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff to be aware of mental health difficulties and respond appropriately to students. Develop an understanding of boundaries, referral, and staff support. <p>Policy and workloads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review staff focused policies and procedures to better support mental health and wellness. Provide an equitable and transparent allocation of work to ensure fairness, reasonable expectations, and quality outputs. Recognise tolerable demands of time, physical, cognitive, emotional, and change management demands. <p>Self-care and help-seeking capabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build capabilities and protective factors through participation in wellness activities and training. <p>Environments that facilitate social connection and resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train and develop staff and line managers on positive, proactive leadership. Encourage risk assessments to identify and mitigate mental health risk Create opportunities for staff social connection. 	<p>Mental health first aid network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide free training for staff to improve the skills and knowledge required to identify and respond to staff and students who are experiencing early signs of psychological distress and/or mental illness. <p>Safe and supportive workplaces (WHS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop stay-at-work or return-to-work plans for staff who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition, tailored to individual needs and incorporating any reasonable adjustments. Develop support plans in collaboration with the staff member, their treating health professional(s), their family members and those who support them, and review plan regularly. Co-design activities for staff priority groups including Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and staff who are experiencing disability. <p>Reporting mechanisms for risks to staff psychosocial wellness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deploy effective wellness interventions. Identify symptomatic behaviours and early action (WHS and HR). <p>Access to a range of external and internal mental health and wellness supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to EAP, welfare staff, grievance officers, human resources staff, peer supporters, and JCU Equity Officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visibility and engagement with of mental health and wellness approaches in staff-facing policies and procedures. Increase in access to data demonstrating help-seeking behaviours, early identification, and action. Participation in staff-specific training and wellness activities to develop protective factors. Participation in priority group mental health and wellness programs and actions. Communication of health and wellness strategies, policies, and programs to staff, students and peers.

Live

Promote:	Protect:	Respond:	Success Indicators:
<p>Open conversations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish opportunities for open conversations about mental health and promote self-care behaviours, including appropriate help-seeking, and improving the mental health awareness, knowledge, and skills of our community. <p>Health promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage positive health and wellness behaviours (adequate sleep, healthy eating, non-smoking campus, etc.). Educate students and staff on the links between physical and mental health. Establish clear communication and signage to students and staff to promote health and wellness. <p>Belonging and connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase student awareness of opportunities for on-campus and online social connections, including with the Student Association, sporting clubs, and societies, to promote a sense of belonging and connectedness with other students. Make use of student-staff interactions for connection and an ethic of care messaging at student-centred, and online and on-campus events, course and subject consultations, discipline-based events, and meetings. <p>Visible leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase attendance by leaders at events and training, and promote an openness for conversations about mental health and wellness, with the ability to make referrals and follow up actions. 	<p>Healthy environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise spaces for mentally healthy activities, including walk and talk, walking trails, and student-staff consultation. Establish safe and supportive environments including rainbow lounges and student study spaces. Assure the non-smoking campus environment is followed to be respectful of others. Create networking opportunities on and off campus. <p>Healthy culture for learning and living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value the relationship between work and home life in study loads, teaching, and communication expectations (e.g., email responses during work hours). Value inclusion and diversity through JCU Respect training, participation in wellness activities, and through external training opportunities. Utilise resources to build capabilities (e.g., mindfulness, time management plans). Attend to social and mental wellness in timetabling, study preparation, course enrolment, and when scheduling consultation times. Utilise student-staff interactions (individual or group, on-campus and virtual) to develop connections. <p>Healthy debriefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create informal debriefing opportunities for staff to build mental health and wellness literacies. <p>Diverse and healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create co-designed opportunities and cohesive, engaging extra-curricular activities that foster a sense of belonging for students, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. <p>Policy and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend to policies, procedures, and management support to address work/life balance. 	<p>Evidence and improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collate internal and external data sets on access, participation, effectiveness, and training to analyse improvement across the domains of learn, work, live, support. Assure quality counselling by monitoring the services utilised, the level of demand, and partnerships. <p>Early recognition and action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed early identification and action workflows in relevant student-facing processes. Train client service staff in workflows for personalised service and quick action. Alert relevant academic staff that onsets of mental ill-health can be associated with transition to university, peaks in assessment, associated external factors, and how to activate support. Utilise JCU Equity Officers as the safe, confidential and supportive point of contact for students and staff to seek help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visibility of mental health and wellness messaging, activities, participation. Utilisation of JCU Equity Officers and staff-student interactions for connection, early identification, and action. Collation and analysis of evidence base for reporting and improvements. Provision of priority group mental health and wellness programs, with evidence of engagement and actions. Increased participation in activities that foster a sense of belonging for students, and collegiality for staff.

Support

Promote:	Protect:	Respond:	Success Indicators:
<p>Student and staff awareness and communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve awareness of mental health support services and resources using Apps, email communications, and online resources. <p>Communicate safely and effectively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated communications for student and staff mental health and wellness (e.g., Safety and Wellbeing webpage). Communication and cultural action plans in student residences. Assure communications are accessible and appropriate to culture and context. <p>Student agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for student-led mental health and wellness activities (e.g., JCUSA, clubs and societies, student-centred events). <p>Mental health crisis and support critical incident management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop clear policies and protocols around psychological distress, suicide ideation, and risk. <p>Visibility of mentally healthy workplace within and external to JCU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative on and off-campus, and virtual wellness events with community partners and external organisations. Involvement in community events and discussions promoting mentally healthy workplaces and environments. 	<p>JCU and community services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain and expand links and referrals with community mental health services and specialist services. Explore services that can assist in holistic mental health support including disability, discrimination, housing and financial pressures, learning, employment, etc. <p>Educative opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide free training for students and staff in mental health and wellness. Provide specific suicide prevention and intervention training to staff (e.g., Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), particularly for staff in leadership positions). Familiarise nominated specialist staff with the Suicide Toolkit for Australian Universities. Create joint JCU and community services group therapy/awareness sessions for conditions and supports. 	<p>Quality psychological counselling services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase flexibility in counselling services. Increase partnerships with community services and organisations (e.g., Headspace), particularly for priority groups. <p>Crisis response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed and monitor culturally appropriate incident responses, and evaluate protocols, frameworks, and flowcharts specific to mental health crises. Review the process of notifying the JCU community after a student or staff member has died by suicide or other traumatic event. Provide timely support to staff bereaved by the suicide of a colleague, family member, friend, or student. Provide timely support to students bereaved by the suicide of a fellow student, family member, friend, or staff member. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased use of Student App and JCU Safe App to seek help and access services. Enhanced communications that are culturally appropriate and context specific. Increased number of, and engagement in, student-led mental health and wellness activities. Enhanced critical incident policy, workflows, and communication. Participation in staff-specific training (e.g., suicide prevention). Increased student and staff involvement in partnerships and activities with mental health and wellness organisations and community service.

Successful Outcomes – Monitoring, Evaluation and Timeframe

Commitments:	Monitor that:	Responsibility:	Evaluation:	Timeframe:
Leadership	Mental health and wellness awareness is included in PDP		PDP updated, initial evaluation using staff feedback	By June 2023
	Mental health and wellness awareness training is undertaken by leaders, and planned for all staff	Chief of Staff, DVC Academy, DVC Education, DVC Indigenous Education and Strategy, DVC Research, DVC Services and Resources, Director HR	Every leader and manager to have undergone mental health and wellness awareness training, and all staff to build awareness related to their position and level of responsibility	Leaders and managers by December 2023, with ongoing inductions
	The Mental Health Task Force (previously Steering Committee) monitors the development and delivery of implementation activities		Mental Health Task Force nominated and trained, and its work communicated effectively	Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
Fit-for-purpose University policies and procedures	Consultation takes place in accordance with JCU's Policy framework and there is commitment to the actions and success indicators outlined in this Strategy	Policy sponsors	Policy and procedures updated to better include mental health and wellness (plus the processes for actioning policy) New policies and procedures established in line with the Strategy	Included in annual report of policy amendments at Education Committee (Meeting 1 each year)
Fit-for-purpose venues and spaces	Rainbow lounges, peer spaces, and online communities and networks are established New buildings or refurbishments include a wellness space	Director Estate, DVC Education, TSD, Marketing	Annual audit of physical and online spaces to assure the Strategy is implemented effectively and is in line with changing student needs	Gradual introduction, physical spaces to complete by December 2025 with annual reports to Estate Advisory Committee and Student Experience Sub-Committee
Mental health and wellness embedded in the curriculum	Information and training about mental health and wellness is embedded in academic, social, and support activities	DVC Academy, DVC Education, DVC Research, DVC Indigenous and Education Strategy, Directors, Deans	Planning, mapping, and auditing courses and subjects (in particular core and practice-based) to review the student workload and evaluate the resources and activities available to students.	Commence November 2022 Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
			Provision of mental health and wellness curriculum resources and activities	Commence November 2022 Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
			Bi-annual student feedback on activities offered by JCU	Commence May 2023 Report to Student Experience Sub-Committee

Commitments:	Monitor that:	Responsibility:	Evaluation:	Timeframe:
Effective awareness and communication	Staff have access to relevant data, and training in using that data	DVC Education, Chief of Staff, DVC Academy, Directors, Deans, Marketing	Outcomes of the training available, and how data are communicated	Commence February 2023
	Priority areas have been identified for targeted resources and communications		Student and staff feedback on communications, resources and usefulness of programs	Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
Effective resources and help seeking behaviours	Mental health literacy, support skills, training and resources and services available to students and staff are current, accessible, and fit-for-purpose	DVC Education, Chief of Staff, Directors, Deans	Reports from Colleges, JCU support services, Equity Officers, and the Student Association, and student and staff feedback to guide ongoing improvement	Ongoing Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year) December each year – VCAG and VCOG
Increased partnerships and activities	New MOUs, joint training/workshops, and referral agreements are introduced	DVC Education, DVC Academy, Chief of Staff, Directors, Deans, DVC Indigenous Education and Strategy	Assure that any new MOUs, joint training/workshops, and referral agreements are fit-for-purpose and sustainable before full implementation (a pilot may be run), and evaluate existing partnerships as part of the University's quality review cycle.	Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
	Current MOUs, joint training/workshops, and referral agreements are fit-for-purpose			December each year – VCAG and VCOG
Student-led and priority group initiatives	The Student Advisory Forum has representative membership and meets regularly	DVC Education, DVC Indigenous Education and Strategy, Directors, Deans, International	Inclusion of Student Advisory Forum recommendations in JCU's actions, and alignment with the success indicators in the four Domains	Commence August 2022
	Student-led and priority group initiatives are supported through the Student Experience Sub-Committee and Student Advisory Forum			Annual report to Education Committee (Meeting 6 each year)
			Regular formal and informal feedback from students	

Reporting

- There will be a formal annual report and presentation to the University Executive evaluating the progress made towards the success indicators in each of the Domains.
- Annual reporting on the outcomes and effectiveness of the implementation of the JCU Mental Health and Wellness Strategy will be undertaken at the management and governance levels of the University as follows: University Executive, Vice Chancellors Advisory Group and Vice Chancellors Operations Group, and Education Committee.

Glossary and References

Glossary

Curriculum – encompasses academic, social, and support aspects of the student experience and includes co-curricular activities in addition to formal learning (Kift & Field, 2009)

Mental health – a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. Mental health is crucial to personal, community, and socio-economic development (World Health Organisation, 2022)

Psychological distress – emotional suffering caused by stress, anxiety, and depression

Reporting – a regular, formalised method of communication to management and governance to establish whether actions have been achieved, what resources have been expended, what problems have been encountered, and whether the project is expected to be completed on time and within budget

Suicidal ideation – the presence of any thoughts, plans, images, imaginings or preoccupations a person may have about ending their own life

Suicide – the act of intentionally causing your own death

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