

Designing A University-Wide Approach for the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Staff and Students

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Recent research on Victoria students unveiled findings that demonstrated that a coordinated, university wide approach to mental health and wellbeing promotion was necessary. The *Tertiary Student Health Survey 2013* outlined that up to 20% of Victoria students experienced moderate-severe levels of depression, and, up to 45% of students experienced a level of anxiety that met the criteria for “other anxiety syndrome”. Additionally the University’s *Student Experience Improvement Survey 2013* found that 43% of Victoria students rated their wellbeing as poor.

In November 2013, Appreciative Inquiry research on student wellbeing was conducted as part of the Student Wellbeing Planning Workshop; a workshop that interested university staff and students were invited to attend. The findings from this research echoed statistical data; student experience was recognised as inherently stressful, students lacked resiliency and coping strategies, students felt disconnected, lacked a sense of purpose, and did not feel cared for by the university. These factors impacted their ability to study and achieve academically. The findings also revealed that whilst staff felt mental health and wellbeing was valued, it was not communicated effectively to the student population. The mixed messages on mental health and wellbeing lead to a lack of buy in from the Victoria students. Finally, staff strongly felt mental health and wellbeing promotion had to be led by them, and to do so, more training and a shift in culture was required.

With this in mind, Victoria’s approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing promotion for 2014-2016 was designed. A model was created, which outlines seven Mental Health and Wellbeing goals, each with specific key result areas (or performance indicators). Ultimately these goals serve as a grounding for all mental health and wellbeing promotion, ensuring that it is needs-based and consistent. This, alongside strong collaboration within the university, ensures Victoria supports academic success through building staff, student, and institutional resilience and capacity. The Student Counselling Service is currently working on phase one: building a common wellbeing language, developing resources to aid in embedding wellbeing in curriculum, and rolling out education programs.

Key Words

Mental Health
Wellbeing
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Policy