Whole-of-University Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Becoming a Vibrant, Inclusive, And Values-Based Community

2025 Agenda

Contents

Appendix 1. Australian Universities Mental Health Framework (AUMHF)

Appendix 2. AUMHF - Case Study Flinders University – Wellbeing for Success

Prepared by the Flinders University Wellbeing Working Group

This strategic plan has been developed in consultation and partnership with staff and students, and consideration of guiding evidence and best practice guided by the Flinders Wellbeing Working Group. The strategy is consistent with the Higher Education Standard Panel recommendation that every institution have an institution-wide mental health strategy (Department of Education, 2018), the Australian University Mental Health Framework (Orygen, 2020), and the requirement to provide university staff and student mental health strategies as part of University Based Mission Compacts (2022-23). In addition, we have drawn on resources from across the Higher Education sector including Healthy Universities Network U.K. , the Okanagan Charter (2015) in Canada, and the Framework for Promoting Student Mental Health and Wellbeing in Australia (Baik et al. 2017). This document is to be interpreted in a manner consistent with other strategic documents including the 2025 Agenda, Flinders Reconciliation Action Plan, the Flinders Education Quality Framework and the Flinders Student Retention and Success Strategy.

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1. The Flinders Wellbeing Mission:

The Flinders Wellbeing Mission is to establish a university-wide holistic approach to wellbeing, providing an environment for work and study that supports wellbeing, equipping staff and students with the knowledge and skills to cultivate wellbeing across their lives and support others to do the same.

Nothing is more central to our organisational mission of changing lives and changing the world than supporting the wellbeing and development of our people. We also believe that both education and work are activities that can support the wellbeing of our people and, if designed with care, can support the growing and changing needs of people over the lifetime of their association with the University and beyond.

Flinders is committed to becoming a leading university for wellbeing. Supported by cutting edge research on wellbeing, our goal is not only to reduce the risk of onset of health problems, but to help our staff and students flourish by becoming more literate about wellbeing, better able to support their own and others' wellbeing, reflective about diverse experiences of wellbeing, and willing to implement structural changes that will improve wellbeing.

This Mission is underpinned by our University's culture: We are student-centred and we value Integrity, Courage, Innovation, and Excellence.

To be an organisation that puts people first we must have the integrity to implement the highest standards and actively hold ourselves to them. Integrity to be humble and to learn from each other. Integrity to acknowledge when we get it wrong and always seek to do better.

To become a leader in wellbeing will take courage. Courage to ask difficult questions and have important conversations. Courage to set aspirational goals. Courage to cross boundaries and possibly to embrace our own discomfort. Courage to change our own behaviours and to lead by example.

To address wellbeing as an organisation will take innovation. Innovation will be needed to move us beyond the status quo models of business, research, and education that have been handed down to us, to imagine a world where we place people at the centre of systems and seek to maximise the best of what it means to be human. Achieving this mission will take a passion for excellence; only a commitment to excellence will move us beyond box ticking and cultivate genuine collaboration and change together. Only then, will we fearlessly attempt what others say cannot be done.
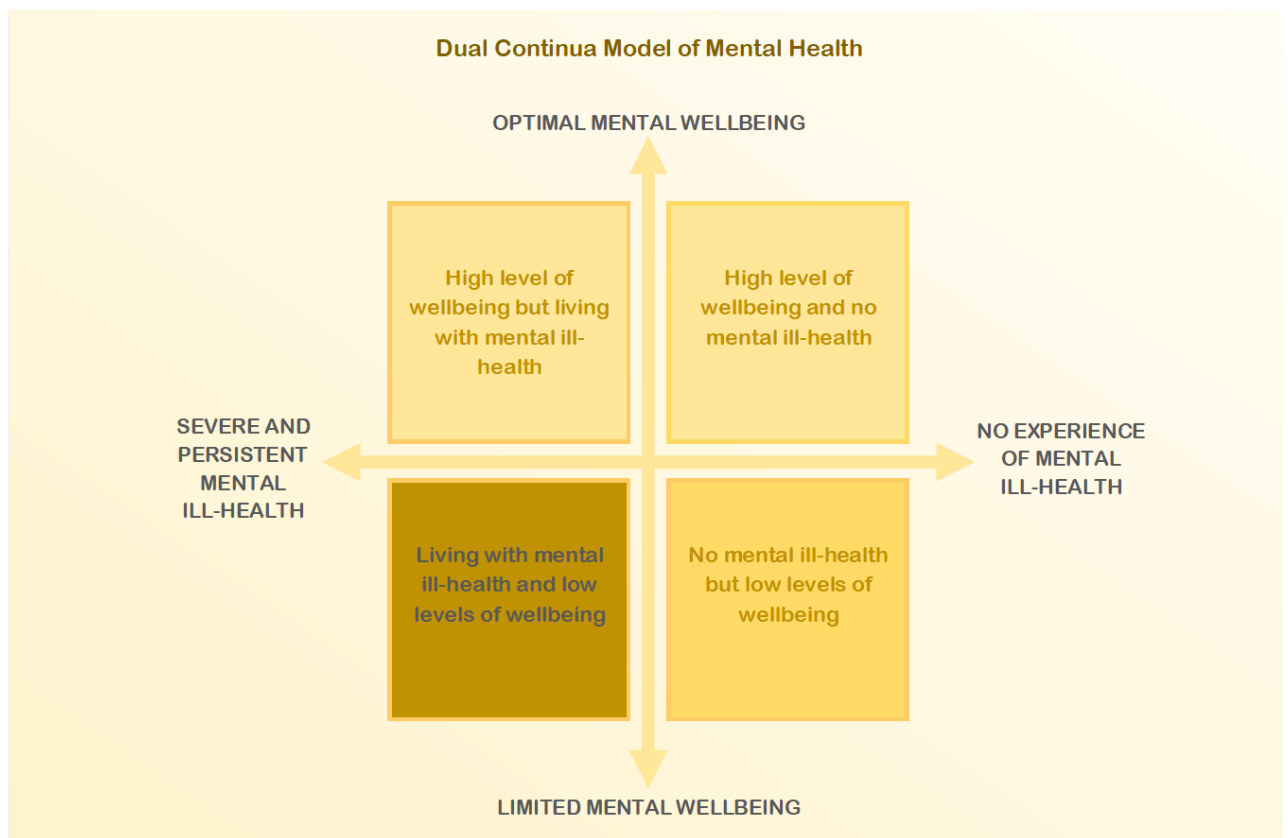
During 2020 there were very few issues that became as high priority as the health and wellbeing of people. Student mental health is on the national agenda, and research conducted at Flinders has helped to highlight the needs of students and the general community, inclusive of our staff. Higher Education has come under increased pressure and our staff have carried that burden. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on mental health have also highlighted the importance of maintaining resilience in order to maximise our wellbeing and facilitate peak performance.

Addressing the priorities within this document will help Flinders to achieve its 2025 Agenda to be a world leader in education and research, and to be a vibrant, inclusive, and values-based community.

2. What is Wellbeing at Flinders?

At Flinders, we understand that wellbeing is made up of many parts. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not just the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 1946).

An emphasis on wellbeing within a university must include a growth focus where we foster the positive development of wellbeing and health, as well as a support focus. Any actions need to operate at multiple levels of a "stepped-care" approach comprising a hierarchy of actions and interventions—from the least to the most intensive (e.g. prevention, early intervention, support, treatment, and recovery). There is uniformity in our approach with the dual continua models of health and mental health, and consistency with the Australian University Mental Health Framework. This dual continua approach recognises that people can experience both illness and yet concurrently experience personal wellbeing, and on the other hand, people may not be classified as having an illness, yet can be experiencing poor wellbeing. Both continua need to be addressed.

Dual Continua Model of Mental Health

OPTIMAL MENTAL WELLBEING

High level of wellbeing but living with mental ill-health

High level of wellbeing and no mental ill-health

SEVERE AND PERSISTENT MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

NO EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

Living with mental ill-health and low levels of wellbeing

No mental ill-health but low levels of wellbeing

LIMITED MENTAL WELLBEING

At Flinders, our wellbeing strategy is guided by 5 aspects of wellbeing. Identification of these aspects was informed by discussion with our staff and students via focus groups and surveys during 2019, as well as consideration of the science of health and wellbeing, and guidance from best practice frameworks.

1. **Connection, Community and Identity** – a community where all staff and students can find their sense of place, feel like they belong, can access meaningful support and can both develop and find acceptance of their professional, personal, and cultural identities.

2. **Self-Determination: Agency, Purpose, Growth** – a community that provides individuals with the knowledge, skills and environmental supports necessary to help them progress towards what is

meaningful to them and build a sense of confidence, competence, and control over their own circumstance.

3. **Intellectual, Reflective, and Contemplative Life** – a learning culture that prizes intellectual growth, rationality, self-reflection, listening, creativity, humility, empathy, nurturance of self and others, and deep thinking.

4. **Physical and Mental Health** – a physical, online, and cultural environment that supports staff and students to invest in their physical and mental health, prioritises health-related needs (such as nutrition, exercise, rest, physical space, work health, and safety needs), maintains an environment where all can flourish personally and socially, and enables access to support when health and wellbeing are challenged or compromised.

5. **Safety, Shelter, and Finances** – where all students and staff have the necessary foundational requirements for being able to engage with their study and work.

While we intentionally consider each aspect of wellbeing, we understand that all of these are interconnected, and changes in one area (e.g., Connection, Community and Identity) can impact on other areas (e.g., Mental and Physical Health). Below are non-exhaustive examples of what this might look like at Flinders, as identified by our Wellbeing Working Group and focus group participants across 2019. More specific discussions about implementation plans will take place after this strategic framework has been approved.

	Examples of what wellbeing might look like according to staff and students at Flinders.
Connection, Community and Identity:	Supporting people to develop a sense of belonging and multiple social group memberships and providing opportunities for meaningful social connections.
	Relationships grounded in respect, safety, commitment, empowerment, reciprocity, inclusiveness, collaboration, interconnectedness, integrity, generosity of spirit and creativity.
	Cultural connections and an environment where students and staff can see their culture reflected at Flinders.
	Strategies and supports for those experiencing loneliness, isolation, or exclusion.
	Pro-active and healthy responses to conflict and relationship breakdown, at university and outside of university.
	Equitable access to work, learning and community.
	Opportunities to look, listen and learn from others.
Self-Determination: Agency, Purpose and Growth	Championing diversity and inclusion.
	Living out our values, with clarity as to how that translates into everyday behaviour.

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	Examples of what wellbeing might look like according to staff and students at Flinders.
	Supporting people's ability to pursue a sense of agency, purpose, and growth in work and learning.
	Addressing systemic discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, etc.) that undermines self-determination.
	Supporting intellectual, cultural, spiritual, and religious autonomy.
	Helping students and staff find meaning and purpose in their studies/work, and to establish a sense of competence.
	Facilitating specific initiatives aimed at awareness, development, and maintenance of self-determination.
	Supporting staff and student capacity to deal with challenges, deal positively with failure, acknowledge, and build from shortcomings.
	Being receptive to feedback, pursue opportunities for self-reflection, and provide opportunities for personal and professional growth.
	Championing the development of self-efficacy and self-determination skills.
Intellectual, Reflective and Contemplative Life:	Engaging in practices of dadirri[*] (deep listening), contemplation, self-reflection, or spiritual development.
	Embracing diversity with humility and empathy.
	Providing opportunities to hear from others different to ourselves.
	Engaging with one's interests, imagination, and creativity.
	Exchanging and engaging with intellectual, and cultural knowledge, i.e. engaging with our own and others' cultural and spiritual practices and perspectives through opportunities to observe and experience diverse practices and viewpoints.
	Seeing and valuing the wisdom of others.
	Championing respectful freedom of speech.
	[*] *The word, concept and spiritual practice that is dadirri (da-did-ee) is from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory)*
Mental and Physical Health:	Creating environments, systems and resources that support good physical and mental health,
	Accommodating needs for wellbeing, including a safe environment, and needs for nutrition and physical exercise.
	Facilitating community awareness of physical and mental health and their determinants.
	Reducing stigma for mental ill health.

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	Examples of what wellbeing might look like according to staff and students at Flinders.
	Building clear and appropriate avenues for those seeking help, accessible to all.
	Creating specific initiatives aimed at health and mental health development, maintenance and promotion, and designed using a student-staff partnership approach.
	Monitoring and reviewing levels of wellbeing across the University.
	Cultivating appropriate resources aimed at skills development to support self-management of physical and mental health across the life course.
	Providing equitable pathways for work and learning for those with ill health.
	Partnering with the wider community and external bodies to ensure adequate continuity of care for students or staff experiencing ill health.
Safety, Shelter, and Finances:	Building avenues of support for staff and students to have shelter and a place to call home.
	Supporting staff and students to be safe from harm when working and studying.
	Supporting staff and student capacity to manage and meet financial obligations in a sustainable way.
	Recognising the need to earn income while studying as a normal part of university life for students.
	Providing pathways to learn skills on how to balance life, work, study and finance habits

How is this currently being achieved?

Flinders currently has many activities to support the wellbeing of its students. These current activities have been mapped to principles of the **Australian University Mental Health Framework (AUMHF, 2020).**

1. The student experience is enhanced through mental health and wellbeing approaches that are in formed by students' needs, perspectives and the reality of their experiences.

2. All members of the university community contribute to learning environments that enhance student mental health and wellbeing.

3. Mentally healthy university communities encourage participation; foster a diverse, inclusive environment; promote connectedness; and support academic and personal achievement.

4. The response to mental health and wellbeing is strengthened through collaboration and coordinated actions.

5. Students are able to access appropriate, effective, timely services and supports to meet their mental health and wellbeing needs.

6. Continuous improvement and innovation is informed by evidence and helps build an under standing of what works for student mental health and wellbeing.

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Flinders has already been identified within the framework as a leader in the area of student wellbeing in Higher Education (see Appendix 2). See Appendix 1 for AUMHF.

Flinders has a strong history of supporting students. During COVID-19, Flinders was one of a small number of universities that saw an increase in ratings for student support. Ratings for student support declined 0.9% nationally, while Flinders rose 3.9%, testament to the extraordinary effort of teaching and support staff to deliver high quality learning in trying circumstances. Flinders jumped from 16th nationally in 2019 to 10th nationally in 2020 on undergraduates' ratings of student support.

At Flinders, our staff and students want to go beyond what we have delivered in the past, build on our best practice, and continue becoming a vibrant, inclusive, and values-based community through more strategic, university-wide initiatives that will enable our wellbeing mission. However, we also recognise that this document does not provide specific answers on the "how" this will be achieved. Rather this document is intended to provide impetus for active reflection, identification of short comings, and accountability on actions.

3. Strategic Wellbeing Objectives for 2021-2025.

Our wellbeing mission will be achieved by a set of strategic activities focussed on four key objectives. Identification of these strategic objectives was informed by discussion with our staff and students via focus groups and surveys in 2019. These have been mapped to principles of the **Australian University Mental Health Framework (AUMHF, 2020)** but have been identified based on priorities, needs, resources and timing to create effective and sustained change as identified by the Flinders Wellbeing Working Group. Annual strategic foci will be used to enable action, delivery, accountability and sustainability of the strategy. However, we acknowledge that good work in each of these areas has already commenced and needs to be built on and developed over time in order to achieve the objectives by the time point indicated. Further, there are some sub actions that may need to be brought forward due to urgent needs, resource availability, or potential for advanced, combined strategic actions.

2022 Objective 1: Collaborative and Coordinated Action Using a Students-As-Partners Approach

The student experience is enhanced through mental health and wellbeing approaches that are informed by students' needs, perspectives, and the reality of their experiences. (AUMHF principle 1)

The response to mental health and wellbeing is strengthened through collaborative and coordinated action. (AUMHF principle 4)

Across focus groups conducted in 2019, it was clear that Flinders had many undertakings that tackled wellbeing. However, these undertakings were at times adhoc, siloed, or unknown to many focus group participants. The following four strategies have been developed to address the need for a coordinated university-wide approach. Including both staff and student populations in this approach will enable Flinders to achieve its wellbeing mission. In addition, there was clear priority for valuing the lived experience of both students and staff as equal members in the Flinders community. As such, focus group members regularly mentioned the need for leadership, coordination, and mechanisms to enable voice and visibility, which have been addressed by this first objective.

1. Flinders will formalise leadership and governance structures to align and coordinate Staff and Student Wellbeing leadership and action.
    a. This leadership and structure will be established on principles of partnership to enable coordinated strategy and action across People and Culture, Deans of People and Resources, Academic and Student leaders from each college, Health Counselling and Disability Services (HCD), Flinders University Student Association (FUSA), and other portfolio leaders as required.
    b. A smaller revised Wellbeing Working Group will be formally established and will take on responsibility for the implementation of the wellbeing strategy including accountability and resourcing. The current Wellbeing Working Group will finalise the Terms of Reference, membership and lines of accountability for the revised working group following endorsement of this strategic framework.
2. Establish a Wellbeing Leaders Network with broad participation across the organisation for listening, sharing, training and dissemination of wellbeing initiatives.
3. Establish specific wellbeing implementation priorities for each College that are aligned with the university-wide Flinders Wellbeing Strategy and developed through a students-as-partners approach.

4. Ensure student and staff experience, needs, perspectives, and the reality of their experience are heard and prioritised.
    a. Measure staff and student wellbeing annually.
    b. Pay particular focus on diverse groups with likely additional needs, e.g., students with Disability Access Plans, staff and students with mental health conditions, staff with disabilities, international students both on and offshore, staff and students from rural and remote areas, Indigenous staff and students, veterans, carers, neurodiverse staff and students etc.
    c. Develop indicators of wellbeing that are reported on to Senior Executive, APAC, and University Council aligned with Flinders' shared understanding of wellbeing.
    d. Ensure groups of students at greater risk of mental health and wellbeing issues are engaged in co-designing tailored approaches that address their specific needs in regard to ongoing educational engagement and professional development.

2023 Objective 2: Empower All Members of the University for Wellbeing

Students are able to access appropriate, effective, timely services and supports to meet their mental health and wellbeing needs (AUMF principle 5).

All members of the University community contribute to learning environments that enhance student mental health and wellbeing (AUMHF principle 2).

The response to mental health and wellbeing is strengthened through collaborative and coordinated action. (AUMHF principle 4).

Flinders' wellbeing mission will be accomplished to the extent that every staff and student has an understanding of wellbeing, access to the resources they need to develop and support wellbeing, and awareness of how they are involved in supporting the wellbeing of others. Flinders student feedback consistently emphasised the importance of staff for supporting student wellbeing. As such Objective 2 and the strategies below have been developed to ensure each member for the Flinders University community is developed and equipped to be part of the wellbeing missing.

1. Increase visibility and accessibility of evidence-based wellbeing resources, processes, services and supports:
    a. Review practices and infrastructure that impact on physical wellbeing, inclusive of but not limited to physical access challenges, nutrition options, quality of the built and natural environment, physical activity and relaxation choices, and practices and options related to climate-related health risks.
    b. Review resources and services that support psychological wellbeing through a stepped care lens (i.e., preventative, early intervention, treatment, support, recovery, and personal development/growth).
    c. Ensuring the Flinders wellbeing framework, and associated resources and services are visible and accessible.
        i. Develop an easy to access and use central source (via web) to articulate a shared understanding of wellbeing to the Flinders community,
        ii. Provide knowledge, resources, training and support, and a scaffolded support process from preventative care through to crisis, and recovery.
        iii. Ensure clear referral and access processes are transparent and accessible to all.

2. Clarify staff support roles (including expectations for all staff, both academic and professional staff).
   a. Ensure these staff are trained, supported, and have time allocated to support students.
   b. Clear triage and referral processes are in place, including to internal and external support and treatment services.
3. Staff training:
   a. Embed wellbeing training in onboarding and as part of ongoing professional development so that all staff can support their own wellbeing and function as a first point of contact (triage point) for students when needed.
   b. Train staff to support wellbeing through work, supervisor, and management practices.
   c. Support academic staff to teach in a way that supports student wellbeing.
   d. Enable staff access to wellbeing courses available at Flinders.
4. Student training:
   a. All students have access to training to develop wellbeing as a graduate capability.
   b. Develop and implement wellbeing courses, curriculum embedded approaches, and co-curricular training, so that all students can develop their wellbeing graduate capacity.
   c. Develop student's knowledge of learning approaches that support their own wellbeing.
5. Coordinated campaigns utilising a students-as-partners approach:
   a. Annual wellbeing campaign aligned to measurement of wellbeing.
   b. Coordination of other selected campaigns across Flinders to maximise impact and participation for both staff and students.
6. Connect Flinders staff and students to wider community resources available to support their wellbeing.

2024 Objective 3: Connect to Flinders Community

Mentally healthy university communities encourage participation; foster a diverse, inclusive environment; promote connectedness; and support academic and personal achievement. (AUMHF principle 3).

Objective 3 has been developed to support staff and students' sense of connection to others. It is through interpersonal and intergroup connections that we build a sense of identity, collaborate on meaningful work, and identify and manage difficulties that arise.

1. Create a safe, collaborative Flinders' community.
   a. Prioritise supporting the wellbeing of staff and students from diverse circumstances by uncovering and removing structural barriers to participation in community, including racism, prejudice, discrimination, and harassment.
   b. Provide zero retribution pathways for feedback from staff and students.
   c. Implement Flinders Reconciliation Action Plan and identify and prioritise specific actions from the Reconciliation Action Plan that support student and staff wellbeing.
2. Improve belonging for remote students and staff.
   a. Improved collaboration and connection with rural and remote students and staff.
   b. Improved collaboration and connection with international students studying offshore.
3. Connect staff to staff, students to students and students to staff.
   a. Investigate student and staff experiences of belonging and connection (including enablers and barriers) across Flinders.
   b. Create opportunities for staff and student leaders to connect together.
   c. Prioritise development of clubs, networks, and communities of practice.
   d. Increase availability and visibility of clubs, labs, colloquia, teaching and learning academies, communities of practice, and social opportunities.

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e. Utilise digital solutions to support belonging and community, including co-designed approach to a staff dashboard (Project Compass for staff), and iteration of project compass to further support students' online participation with community.

f. Develop a shared vision of student and staff welfare and provide opportunities for student and staff to support the welfare of others.

4. Further develop approaches to equitable work and learning.
    a. Investigate experience of, and barriers to, sustainability for students and staff.
    b. Review experience of student cohorts identified as at higher risk by the AUMHF.
    c. Re-frame and review organisational approaches to access, flexibility, and disability support as equitable work and learning. Build organisational understanding of what equitable work and learning means, and how this can be achieved.
    d. Support staff to implement best practice to support equitable learning, especially in relation to assessment and work integrated learning.
    e. Providing inclusive, diverse pathways to success, and celebrate diverse examples of academic and professional life.

2025 Objective 4: Design for Best Practice

Continuous improvement and innovation is informed by evidence and helps build an understanding of what works for student mental health and wellbeing. (AUMHF principle 6)

As a university with expertise in wellbeing, we value that expertise and will seek to draw on research to design for best practice to support wellbeing.

1. Evaluate implementation of the Wellbeing Strategic Plan and identify iterative improvements.
2. Establish an annual Flinders Symposium on Wellbeing in Higher Education.
3. Establish a repository of research on best practice to support wellbeing to enable Flinders staff to design for best practice, particularly in areas related to:
    a. Organisational practices and workplace processes
    b. Curriculum design
    c. Teaching practice
    d. Physical space
    e. Wellbeing services, inclusive of face-to-face and digital.
    f. Physical spaces and the built environment
4. Prioritise and fund wellbeing activities that are underpinned by research and evidence.
5. Review wellbeing progress via annual accountability cycles.
6. Adopt best practice standards, pursue best practice awards or certification where possible (e.g., WELL building rating).

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