VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

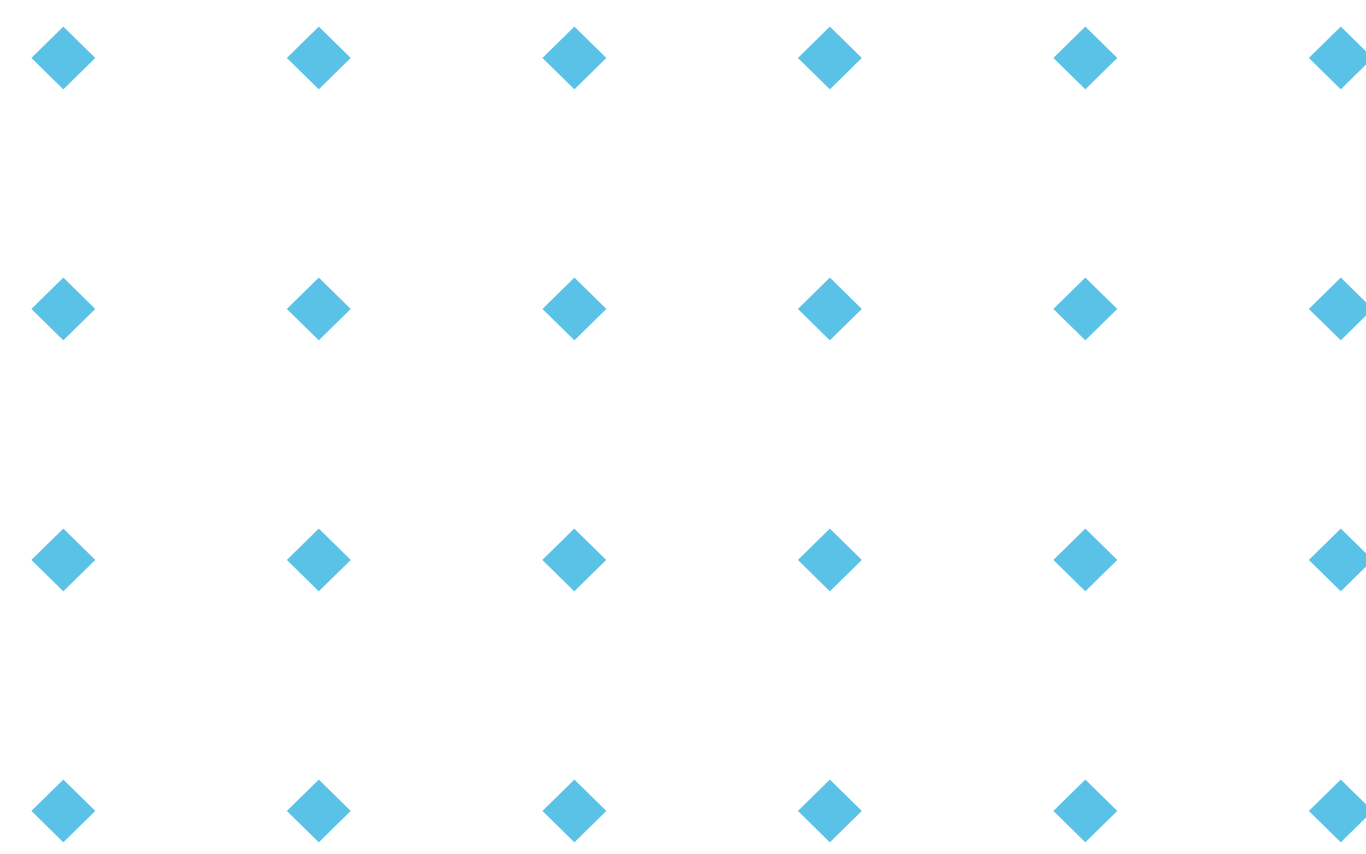# Student Mental Health Plan

2025-2027

Acknowledgement of Country

Victoria University acknowledges, recognises and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Bunurong/Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land in Victoria; the Gadigal and Guring-gai of the Eora Nation who are the traditional owners of University land in Sydney, and the Yalara/Yugarapul people and Turrbal people living in Meanjin (Brisbane).

Contents

Vice-Chancellor's Forward

Victoria University (VU) is a place of learning that seeks to empower and support students from all backgrounds. The Student Mental Health Plan 2025-2027 (SMHP) has been developed in consultation with students, staff and the wider VU Community to create an environment where every student can thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

This plan reflects our recognition of the unique challenges that students face in today's rapidly changing environment, including academic pressures, social dynamics, barriers to learning and personal transitions. This plan aims to provide accessible resources, promote mental health awareness, and cultivate a supportive community where students feel safe to seek help. We understand that each student's journey is distinct, and our approach is designed to address the varied needs of our VU community.

The SMHP seeks to create a collective impact by sharing responsibility for the promotion of student mental health across the whole of VU (students, academic and professional staff, and vocational and higher sectors). It encourages participation and collaboration, welcomes diversity, promotes inclusivity, invests in resources to provide timely, appropriate and effective support services to students, and seeks to innovate and continuously improve.

Thank you for being a part of this vital initiative, and for your continued dedication to the well-being of our community.

Prof. Adam Shoemaker
Vice Chancellor and President

Strategic Context

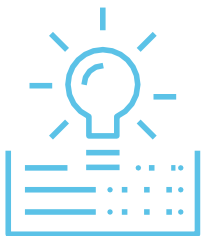Strategic Plan 2022-2028:
Start well, finish brilliantly

Our Vision:

To be a global leader in dual-sector learning and research by 2028

Our Strategic Drivers:

High-Level Objectives

Doing Dual Differently

Commit to national benchmarks and to leading nationally for First Nations and culturally inclusive teaching and learning, delivering learning matched to lives.

Partnering with Principle

Connect and collaborate with First Nations and diverse communities using best practice principles of equality and exchange to cement VU as a place where people have agency and belong.

Maximising Research with Impact

Align with national cultural inclusion research standards to grow our research impact in relation to community outcomes through increased representation of First Nations and diverse research voices.

Protecting Country

Articulate a transformative change agenda that enables the VU community to be aware, informed and engaged in ensuring every facet of our institution reflects our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

A Thriving Place to Study and Work

Create and share spaces that are inclusive, safe and welcoming to support and empower people of all backgrounds to thrive, feel pride and have a sense of belonging.

Mental Health & Studying at University

Tertiary education students experience higher levels of distress and mental disorder than both the general population and their age matched peers, requiring targeted mental health support (Tuck, 2023).

1 in 4
have experienced mental health issues

Approximately 1 in 4 university students in Australia report experiencing mental health issues.

(Aus Uni Survey, 2021)

40%
experience significant anxiety

Around 40% of university students experience significant anxiety while studying.

(Hughes & Spence, 2021)

30%
report symptoms of depression
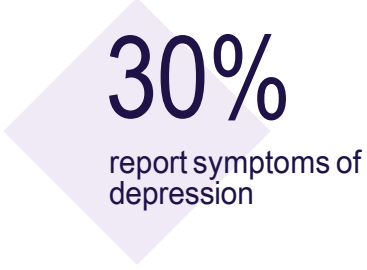
About 30% of students report symptoms of depression, with academic pressures and social isolation common contributing factors.

(Orygen, 2021))

20-30%
seek professional help

Only 20-30% of students with mental health concerns seek professional help. Barriers to support can often be due to stigma and low health literacy.

(Rickwood & Thomas, 2013))

Mental health issues are linked to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates among students

(McGorry, 2020)

Many universities have reported a substantial increase in demand for mental health services since the COVID pandemic and its lasting physical, mental, social and financial impacts
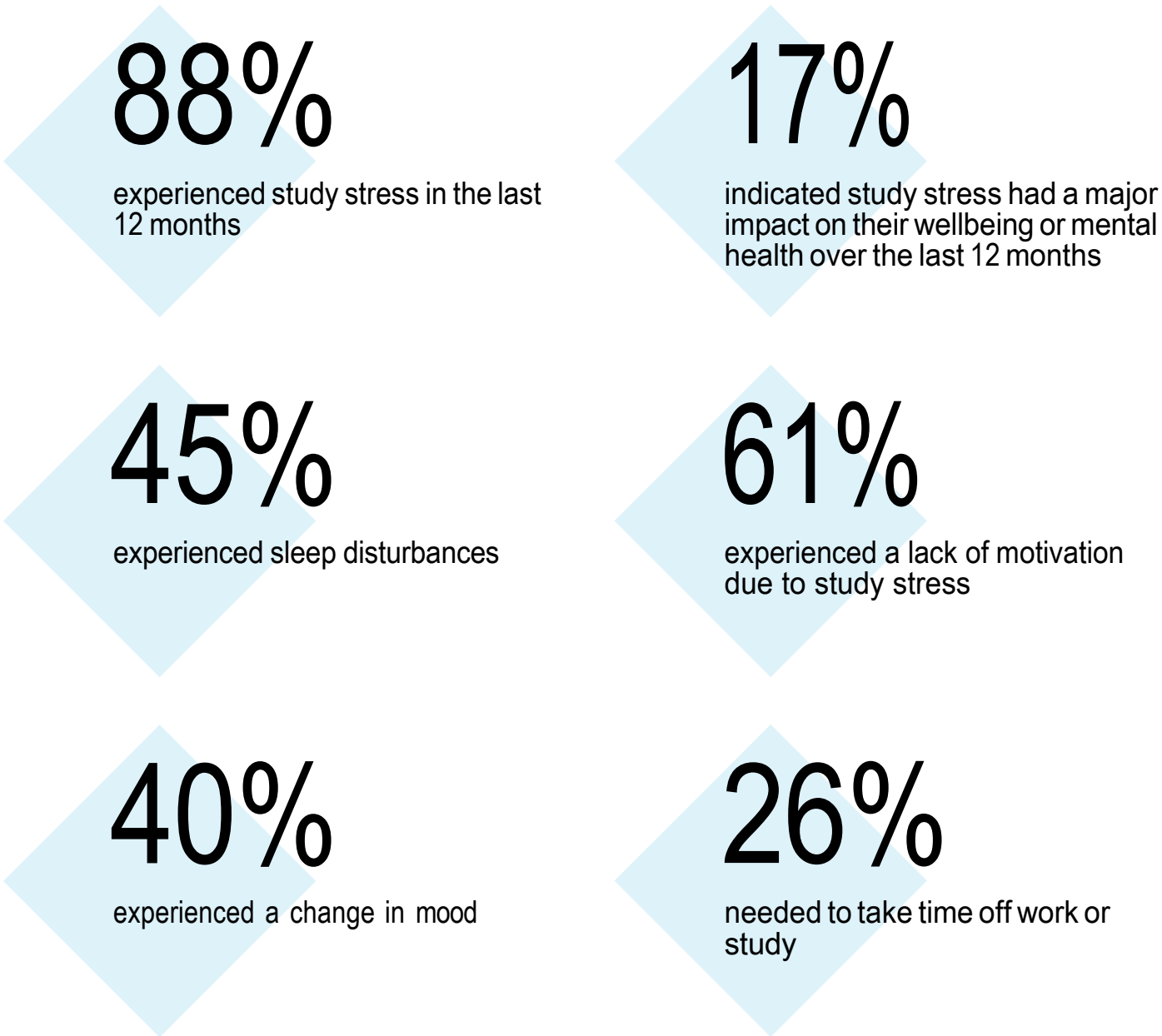
(Universities Australia, 2021)

In 2020-2022, an estimated 8.5 million Australians aged 16-85 had experienced a mental disorder at some time in their life (43% of the population)

(Australia's Health, 2024)

Prevalence & impacts of poor mental health and psychological distress in tertiary students

Tertiary students face a greater risk of experiencing conditions linked to poor mental health, such as financial stress, inadequate sleep and nutrition, and heightened feelings of isolation. These can impact on academic performance and have lasting impacts.

A 2024 Reach Out survey of over 1000 young people (aged 16 - 25) from across Australia found:

88%
experienced study stress in the last 12 months

17%
indicated study stress had a major impact on their wellbeing or mental health over the last 12 months

45%
experienced sleep disturbances

61%
experienced a lack of motivation due to study stress

40%
experienced a change in mood

26%
needed to take time off work or study

(ReachOut, 2024)

Psychological distress and mental ill-health can negatively impact tertiary students' academic performance and engagement causing:

◆ lower grade point averages

◆ increased non-attendance and incompletion rates (attrition)

◆ actual or perceived stigma and discrimination in relation to mental ill-health, and fear of failure

◆ issues associated with mental ill-health such as physical ill-health, negative side effects of medication, and cost of treatment.

(Productivity Comission, 2020: 297, 288)

In Australia, suicide was the most common cause of death for people ages 15-44 years for the period 2019-2021 (Tuck, 2023)

Student Mental Health Plan

Summary

Our Student Mental Health Plan 2025-2027 (SMHP) aims to provide a range of mental health and wellbeing supports, strengthen protective factors and minimise risk factors that impact on the mental health of students at Victoria University.

Using a socio-ecological trauma-informed approach, staff, students, academics and all stakeholders at VU will work together to help deliver the SMHP 2025-2027. Together we will work to lower rates of mental ill-health and see an improvement to physical health, positive study and employment outcomes, and greater productivity. The SMHP aims to help students thrive at university and to support them when things become challenging.
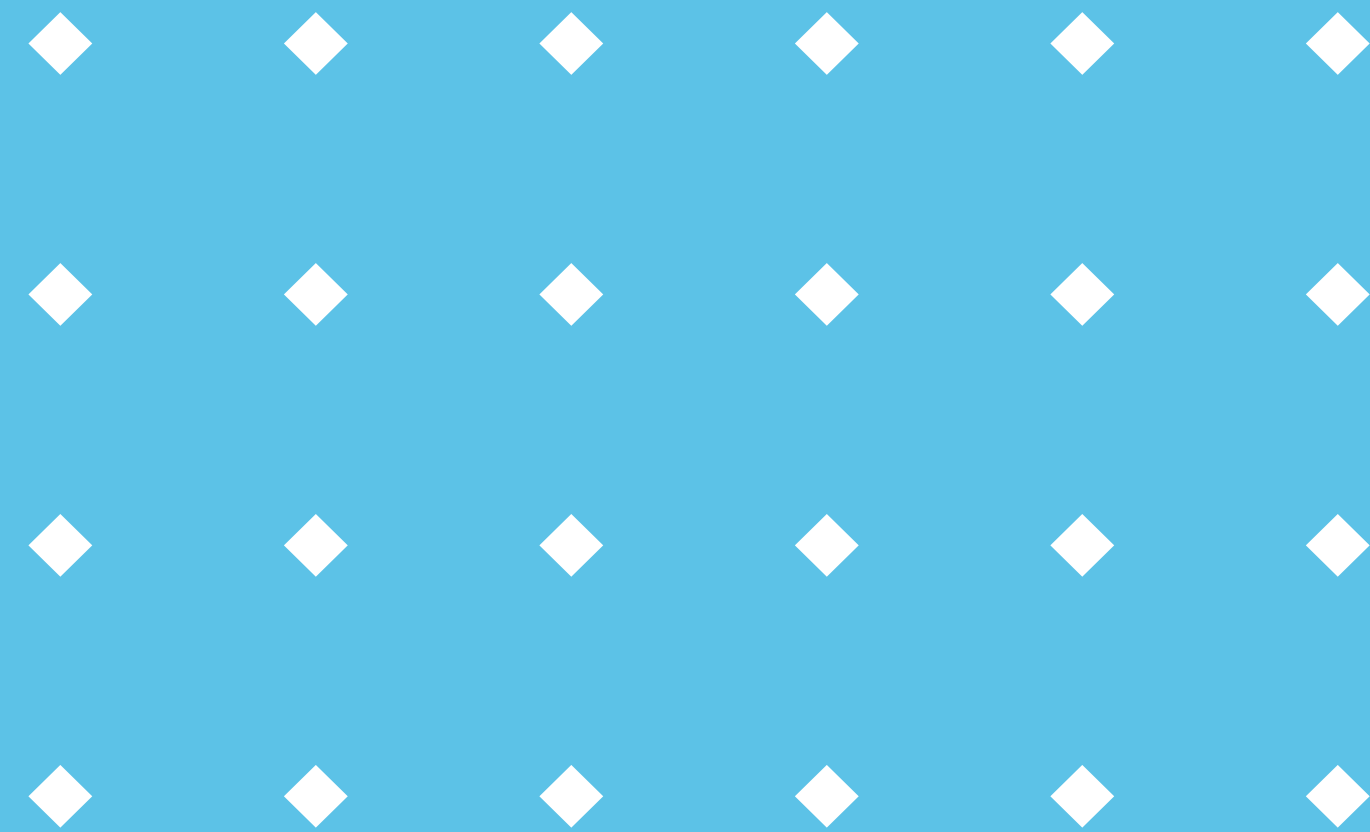
Mental Health Continuum

Emotional and psychological experiences cannot always be distinctly defined as well or unwell, as there are varying levels of mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, it is more accurate to describe emotional experiences as falling along a continuum.

Many of us will struggle with mental health in our lives. Some of us may experience a mental health crisis but we often don't stay in crisis. We often move from the struggling or crisis into a period of healing and then towards thriving again (Beyond Blue, 2024).

Thriving	Reactive	Struggling
◆ Realising potential	◆ Present but distracted	◆ Absenteeism
◆ Engaged in purposeful activities	◆ Procrastinating	◆ Not able to complete tasks
◆ Strong and positive connections	◆ Decreased activity/ socialising	◆ Withdrawal
◆ Confident	◆ Impatient	◆ Excessive anxiety/panic
◆ Normal mood fluctuations	◆ Nervous	◆ Depressed mood/numb
◆ Mindful	◆ Overwhelmed	◆ Change in sleep and appetite

Principles of the Student Mental Health Plan 2025-2027

Victoria University's SMHP is informed by the lived experience of students and staff, various policies and the *Australian University Mental Health Framework* principles.

Principle 1

The student experience is enhanced through mental health and wellbeing approaches that are informed by student's needs, perspectives and the reality of their experiences

Principle 2

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

Principle 3

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

Principle 4

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

Principle 5

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

Principle 6

Continuous improvement and innovation is informed by evidence and helps build an understanding of what works for student mental health and wellbeing

*Orygen. Australian University Mental Health Framework. Melbourne: Orygen 2020.

Objectives and Actions

1 **Establish a VU community that supports students to thrive on the mental health continuum**

- Co-design and collaborate with students of all backgrounds, accessibilities and cohorts to create resources
- Approach wellbeing through a trauma informed approach (individual, relational, community)
- Provide appropriate and targeted mental health support to students identified in the Universities Accord

2 **Learning environment will support student's mental health and wellbeing at VU**

- Promote student and staff awareness of mental health and wellbeing that will support learning experience
- Recommend and/or provide mental health training and guidance for professional and academic staff
- Explore reasonable adjustments that facilitate active participation of students with mental-ill health

3 **Offer students access to a range of mental health and wellbeing resources**

- Provide timely and effective pathways for support
- Support innovative partnerships between VU and external organisations
- Offer students access to 24/7 mental health support line

4 **Create and offer places and spaces that promote a student's mental health and wellbeing**

- Align with VU student accessibility, equity and social inclusion policies
- VU to connect and promote mental health and wellbeing via activities and programs across the university
- Digital and physical spaces/ environment that supports and enhances mental health and wellbeing

5 **De-stigmatise mental health**

- Incorporate issues of intersectionality and barriers to mental health into VU's protocols and policies
- Offer support services across a range of models (in-person, telehealth, online digital technologies)
- Deliver awareness raising campaigns and actively create Psychological Safety at VU

Expected Outcomes of the Student Mental Health Plan

Increased sense of belonging and connection

Increased awareness and acceptance of mental health

An environment that is psychologically safe

Access to a variety of supports

Increased collaboration and partnerships

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Contact Us

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