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Mentally Healthy WA Strategic Direction, 2020 - 2024



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Mentally Healthy WA Strategic Direction, 2020 - 2024

Mental health and well-being is much more than merely the absence of mental illness. The World Health Organization defines mental health as, “state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (1).

Promoting mental health and well-being and the prevention of mental ill health is an imperative for Australian governments at all levels. **Improve mental health outcomes** is the second enduring strategy of the Western Australian (WA) Government’s Sustainable Health Review to progress the sustainability agenda for the WA Health System (2). The WA State Government recognises the importance of prevention of mental illness and prioritises **mental health promotion** as one of its Mental Health Portfolio Priorities 2020-2024 (3). Population focused solutions are essential as about half of all Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime (4). Maintaining and improving mental health and wellbeing can help prevent the onset of mental illness.

“WA needs to reconsider investment priorities that go beyond simply announcing more beds to focus on what will make a real and enduring difference to the health of Western Australians, including ensuring that an engaged health workforce can make best use of emerging technologies and models of care to drive change. Capacity challenges in areas such as mental health must be addressed as part of sound system planning and a commitment to early intervention and person-centred care and value.”

Robyn Kruk AO, Independent Chair, WA Sustainable Health Review (2)

Mentally Healthy WA was established in 2005 to direct the Act Belong Commit health promotion campaign which is one of its key delivery programs. Curtin University researchers developed the Act Belong Commit framework by assessing population perceptions of mental health and the type of behaviours that protect and promote good mental health (5, 6). The campaign was piloted for two years in six regional WA communities prior to launching statewide 2008. Curtin University continues to support Mentally Healthy WA, not only by housing and auspicing the Program, but by building its capacity to achieve its goals through engagement with students and researchers.

Act Belong Commit campaign, developed in WA is the **world’s first comprehensive, population wide, community-based preventive mental health promotion program**. The campaign encourages people to take action to improve and protect their mental health and wellbeing, promotes good mental health strategies at the individual and community level, and encourages the creation of supportive environments for good mental health across a variety of settings including health services, local governments, schools, workplaces, community organisations and local clubs.

Act Belong Commit promotes simple guidelines for positive mental health to inform and remind people about what they can do to keep mentally healthy, specifically:

- ACT - Keep active in as many ways as possible - physically, socially, mentally and spiritually. (i.e. *Do something*)
- BELONG - Keep connected to friends and family; get involved in groups, join in local community activities (i.e. *Do something with someone*)
- COMMIT - Commit to a cause; become a volunteer; learn a new skill; take up a challenge (i.e. *Do something meaningful*)

The comprehensive multi-strategy campaign comprises the state-wide mass-media Act Belong Commit social marketing health promotion campaign, and a range of strategies that build the capacity of the community to extend the reach of the campaign, and to address factors that build and protect good mental health behaviours, including the Partnership Program.

The Act Belong Commit message is a well-recognised, believable and trusted brand that has high population approval ratings. Population-wide telephone surveys conducted by Curtin researchers in 2019 found that 77% of WA adults were aware of the campaign. Importantly, of those who were aware, 67% believed it makes people more open to talking about mental health and 64% believe the campaign reduces the stigma associated with mental illness (7).

There are over 270 signatory organisations to the Act Belong Commit WA Partners Program. As a result, the campaign message is delivered through health services, local governments, schools, workplaces, sport and recreation clubs, arts groups and volunteering organisations. The Partners Program is also delivered in other jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria) and internationally (USA, Denmark, Norway, and the Faroe Islands).

What has changed in the area of mental health promotion?

The need for population wide mental health promotion has never been more evident. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation measures has substantially changed the world and shone a light on the need to build and sustain mental health resilience. Evidence has shown that even early on, the mental health of Australians had declined with one study reporting that the frequency of mental health problems had more than doubled since prior to COVID-19 (8). People are worried about contracting COVID-19 themselves or are worried for their friends and family. People feel uncertain about their future, they are experiencing loneliness, and they are concerned about their finances (2). The long-term implications of the pandemic itself, the mitigation strategies, as well as the economic and social impact are likely to continue to challenge population mental health.

Even before COVID, social connectedness among Australians has been declining over the last two decades:

- From 2010 to 2019, there was been a general decrease in the proportion of people aged 18 years and over who are involved in social groups (63% to 50%), community support groups (33% to 25%), and civic and political groups (19% to 9%)
- Adults volunteering through an organisation declined from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2019
- 68% of Australians had face to face contact with family or friends living outside their household at least once a week, recent migrants and temporary residents (54%) were less likely than people born in Australia (70%) to have face to face contact (9).

The changes over the last decade, and particularly in the last year, have shown that there is an **urgent need to reinforce mental resilience to future proof our population against health and environmental shocks**. An enduring approach to mental health prevention, promotion and maintenance to build mental health resilience across the population has never been more important.

The gold standard approach to address this decline in mental health and wellbeing and build resilience is to use strategic, evidence-based, population health promotion actions to increase activities that encourage social connectedness and feelings of belonging and making a contribution; the suite of Mentally Healthy WA actions (including the Act Belong Commit campaign) is one such initiative. See Figure 1 and outlined in more detail.

Development of the Strategic Direction 2020 -2024

This Act Belong Commit Strategic Direction is based on a review of the current context, previous strategic plan, and emerging evidence. The plan incorporates insights from the Mentally Healthy WA team in early 2020. MHWA conducted a Strategic Planning Review Process with its Steering Committee and staff to review the strategic plan and inform the development of a new strategy. A Strategic Planning Survey was conducted and results were workshopped at the Strategic Planning day held 18 February 2020. The feedback enabled us to utilise and build on the lessons learnt over the last 12 year with people who were involved from the beginning.

Mentally Healthy WA Strategic Direction, 2020 - 2024

Mission

To enhance population mental health by creating supportive environments that strengthen individual and community resilience.

Vision

A society that values mental health and where everyone has the opportunity to be mentally healthy.

Values

- **Integrity** –to act ethically, honestly and with fairness
- **Respect** –to listen, value and acknowledge
- **Courage** –to lead, take responsibility and question
- **Excellence** –to strive for excellence and distinction
- **Impact** –to empower, enable and inspire

Strategic Objectives

Together, work guided by these three strategic objectives will assist us to achieve our vision:

1. Strengthen and consolidate the campaign and its programs to meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of the population overall and extend to reach evolving priority communities
2. Foster mutually beneficial relationships to enhance the capacity to deliver effective and timely mental health promotion
3. Provide leadership and collaborate to build the capacity for evidence-based practice and advocacy in mental health promotion

Figure 1 The Act Belong Commit Strategic Overview



Strategic Actions to build the impact of Mentally Healthy WA

It is time to work together to synergistically create a broad systems change for mental health and wellbeing promotion and prevention in WA. The strategic actions of Mentally Healthy WA (2020 to 2024) are shown in Figure 2. Mentally Healthy WA programs, activities, and infrastructure aligned with the strategic objectives.

The Act Belong Commit state-wide social marketing campaign umbrella is underpinned by a number of strategies, programs, activities and infrastructure support. This approach is consistent with first enduring strategy of the WA Government’s Sustainable Health Review; to **commit and collaborate to address major public health issues** via a sustained effort to reduce disparities in health outcomes in vulnerable populations (2).

The campaign aims to inspire and motivate everyone to prioritise their mental health, **strategic objective 1**. Although population based, special attention will be paid to groups underserved in community interventions including people rendered vulnerable to poor mental health due to their socio-economic circumstances, hardship or disadvantage (through economic, physical, cultural, social or educational factors), parents and carers of children and young adult, Aboriginal people, and people residing in regional communities.

The Partnership Program is as a conduit to develop and increase the knowledge and skills in health promotion among staff and volunteers, **strategic objective 2**. Building health promotion capacity amongst these groups aims to influence environmental and policy changes, making it easier for people to act belong commit

Research and evaluation, advocacy, coalition building, and submissions will provide evidence based sustainable programs and build the infrastructure and support for a Mentally Healthy WA, **strategic objective 3**.

Change is facilitated through dissemination of research findings by publishing in academic journals, presenting at conferences and more broadly to community groups and partner organisations.

Prioritising for the future of mental health promotion strategic actions

The intention is for Mentally Healthy WA to build its capacity to deliver the full range of programs and activities outlined in shown in **Figure 2**. Currently there is an urgent need for mental health promotion across a number of priority population groups. The onset of COVID has identified mental health vulnerabilities in young adults, children, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and people experiencing financial hardship.

Some programs, previously developed by Mentally Healthy WA but currently unfunded, are suitable to meet the needs of young adult (Youth Connector) and Aboriginal people residing in the Pilbara (Standing Strong Together) is funded, however the initiatives are needed in numerous communities.

Effective, tailored mental health promotion initiatives are **urgently needed** for:

1. People rendered vulnerable to poor mental health due to their **social and economic circumstances, and people with disabilities**
2. People from **culturally and linguistically diverse communities** (particularly migrants and refugees and those who are socially isolated)
3. **Young children** and the organisations where they learn and play.

There is **strong evidence and policy imperative regarding the nexus between physical health and mental health**, including increased risk of obesity and non-communicable disease (e.g. diabetes, heart disease and some cancers) (2). We will work to build our shared capacity to protect, promote and maintain both mental and physical health and wellbeing across the population. Mental health must be a key consideration in all health promotion interventions.

Advocacy to develop, embed and monitor policy in organisations and government is an emerging priority. Advocacy is a strength of the Curtin co-location and merging of Mentally Healthy WA with the **Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia** (PHAIWA) under the direction of Associate Professor Christina Pollard.

Finally, through a process of **collaborative capacity building** applying a **systems approach** (10), Mentally Healthy WA and our partners will:

- Work with leaders, organisations and community members to identify mental health promotion priorities and local place-based actions through group **model building processes** (11, 12).
- Facilitate a community of researchers to undertake timely, relevant, high quality, demand driven action research to guide and improve mental and physical health promotion initiatives, and to measure their effectiveness.

Mentally Healthy WA Strategic Directions 2020 – 2024 strengthen and provide sustainable programs to protect, promote and maintain mental health and wellbeing across the population, with a particularly focus on priority populations who are currently underserved. By targeting some of the common determinants of preventable health issues, these Strategic Directions seek to concurrently improve the physical health of the population. The approach is designed to enhance population mental health by creating supportive environments that strengthen individual and community resilience. Ultimately, this strategy is a pathway to a society that values mental health and where everyone has the opportunity to be mentally healthy.

Figure 2 The Act Belong Commit strategic direction framework



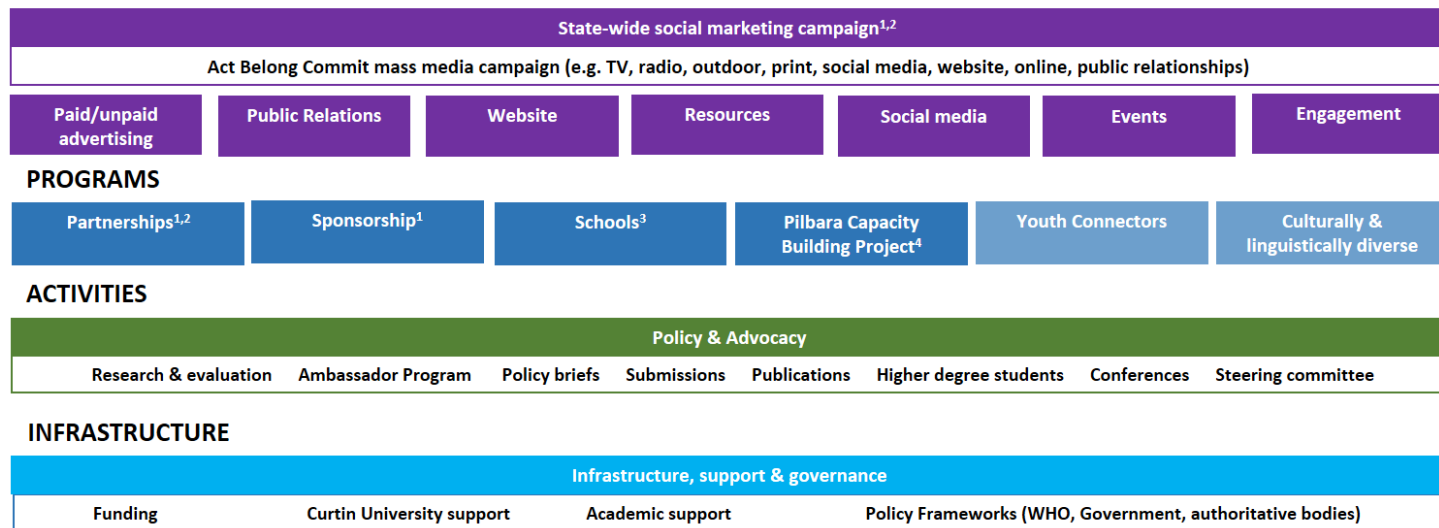
Our vision:

A society that values mental health : and where everyone has the opportunity to be mentally healthy

Our Mission:

To enhance population mental health by creating supportive environments that strengthen individual and community resilience

STRATEGIC ACTIONS 2020 - 2024



LEGEND

Funders:

¹Healthway, ²Mental Health Commission, ³Perron Foundation, ⁴Federal Government

Not currently funded in WA

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