A Mental Health Promotion Approach to Wellbeing in Higher Education

HEA Conference: Supporting Success through Wellbeing in Higher Education

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Overview

Adopting a mental health promotion approach to wellbeing in higher education

- Adopting a mental health promotion approach
  - reframe the challenge of improving mental health and wellbeing

- Implementing a whole campus approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing in higher education settings
  - integrate mental health promotion principles at an organizational level into the core mission, strategic plans and everyday operations of higher education institutes

- Creating supportive campus environments and a culture of mental wellbeing
  - capacity, structures and processes – implementation of a comprehensive, whole institution approach

➢ *Creating mentally healthy higher education settings*

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Mental health is a critical component of health and wellbeing (WHO, 2013)
  - promoting good mental health is a core function of ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all
  - mental health is a positive resource for living that enables to manage our lives successfully

- Promoting mental health contributes to the functioning of individuals, families, communities, and the social and economic prosperity of society (WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2021-2030)

- Higher education settings have a critical role to play in promoting mental health and wellbeing
  - good mental health enables people to grow and learn well and achieve their potential, reduces the risk of poor mental health, and promotes wellbeing

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Growing opportunities and challenges in an increasingly complex and competitive world
    - broad range of cognitive, social and emotional skills are needed for positive development across the life course
    - higher education is a time of transition – new life experiences, personal and social development

- Young people report increasing levels of mental health difficulties (My World Survey 2, 2019; Auerbach et al., 2018; EU, 2015; USI, 2019; UNICEF, 2021)
    - disadvantaged and minority groups are affected disproportionally with poorer social, academic, and mental health outcomes

- Increased recognition of the importance of the social and emotional wellbeing for achieving positive outcomes in life
    - a key asset and resource for good mental health and social and economic development (WHO, 2013; UNICEF, 2021)
    - enables positive outcomes in school, work and life (*Skills for Social Progress,* OECD, 2015; UNICEF, 2021)

- ➢ *building academic success through promoting mental health and wellbeing*

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health
  - rising rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and increases in suicidal thoughts and behaviours on third level students (Chang et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021)
  - negative impacts increased existing inequities (Bambra et al., 2020; Smyth & Nolan, 2022)

- Urgent need for a population level approach to mental health extending beyond individually-oriented treatment
  - mental health promotion interventions that will support people in protecting and enhancing their mental health and wellbeing and reduce mental health inequities (IUHPE, 2021)
  - universal (for all) and targeted (those at higher risk) interventions

- Policies and practices are needed to promote mental health at a population level - ensure that the conditions that create good mental health and reduce inequities are accessible to all

A Health Promotion Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Treatment approaches on their own are not sufficient to improve population mental health (WHO, 2001)
  - need a comprehensive public health approach embracing promotion and prevention alongside treatment and recovery (WHO, 2002; 2004; 2013; 2022)

- Paradigm change in thinking about mental health
  - Broader understanding of mental health - positive mental health and wellbeing
  - Mental health is an integral part of health - interrelationship between physical and mental health
  - Strategies for creating the greatest mental health gain for the greatest number of people – promote, protect and restore good mental health
  - Focus on the health potential of people and their everyday settings for living – address the social determinants of mental health and reduce inequities

➢ *Reframes the challenge of improving mental health*

Global Policy Frameworks

- **WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030**

  "The essential role of mental health in achieving health for all"

    - comprehensive strategies for promotion, prevention, treatment and recovery in a whole-of-government approach

    - to protect and promote the mental wellbeing of all citizens
    - responsibility extends across all sectors and all government departments

- **The UN (2015) Sustainable Development Goals**

    - Goal 3 *"Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"*

- Target 3.4 *"By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through prevention and treatment and **promote mental health and wellbeing"***

- **WHO Geneva Charter for Wellbeing (2021) and global framework**

    - *"Societal well-being that enables all people to flourish and achieve their full physical and mental health potential throughout their lives and across generations."* (WHO, 2022, p. 9)

National Policy Frameworks for Health & Wellbeing

- ***Connecting for Life****: Ireland's Strategy to reduce Suicide 2015-2020* (Department of Health, 2015)

- ***Healthy Ireland*** *national policy framework for improved health and wellbeing, 2013-2025* (Department of Health, 2013); Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025

- ***Sharing the Vision****: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone* (Department of Health, 2020)

- ***Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023*** (Department of Health, 2021)

- ***Stronger Together: HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027*** (Health Service Executive, 2022)

- **Whole population approach**
- **Social determinants of mental health approach**
- **Whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach**
- **Cross-sectoral and inter-departmental coordination structures**
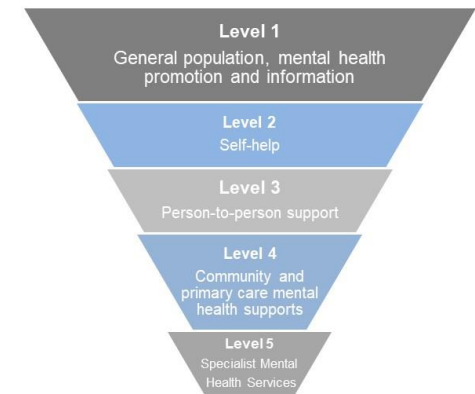
Wellbeing Frameworks

Well-being Framework for Ireland - First Report 2021

Vision: *"enabling all our people to live fulfilled lives now and into the future and is ingrained in well-being across person, place and society"*

- measuring our progress as a society in a unified manner with an overarching focus on equality and sustainability
- framework based on the OECD's How's Life model – 11 dimensions
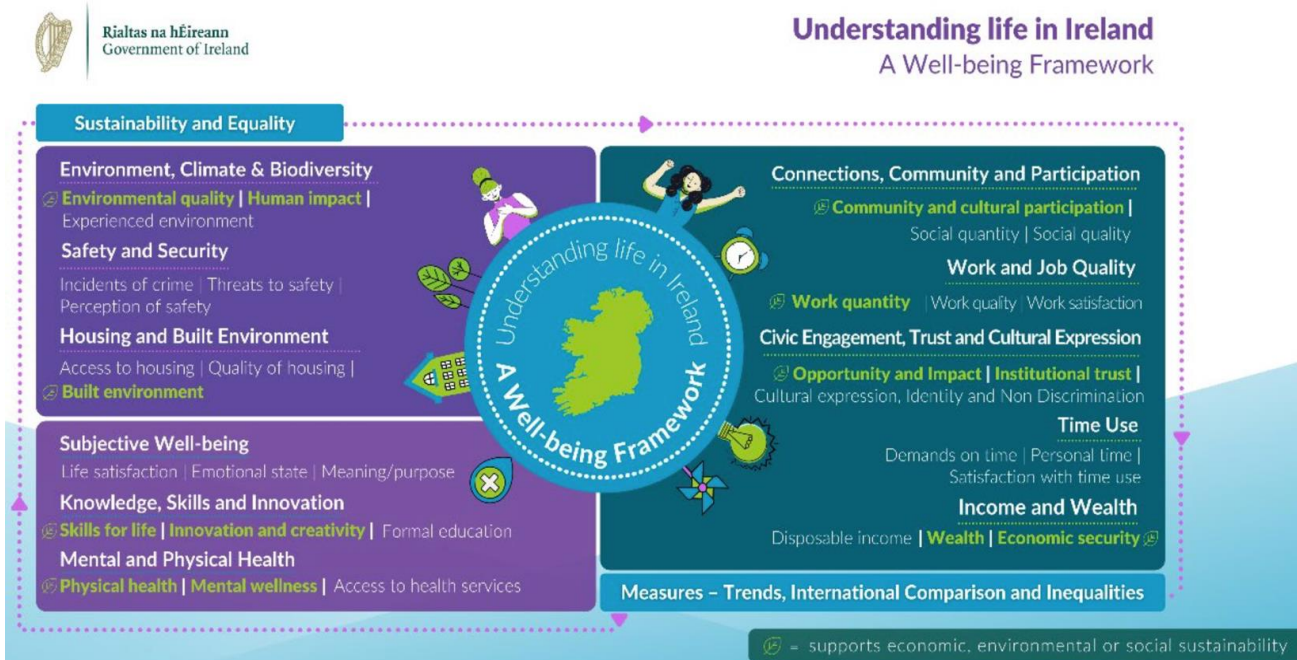
Positive Concepts of Mental Health
'mental health is more than the absence of mental disorder'

Mental health may be defined as:
"A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, to realize their abilities, to learn well and work well, and to contribute to their communities." (World Mental Health Report, WHO 2022)

- Concept of positive mental health (Keyes, 2002; Huppert, 2005; Ryff et al., 2006)
  - subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction
  - positive functioning, engagement and social wellbeing

- Determinants of mental health – multiple interacting biological, psychological, physical, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors
  - cumulative impact of risk and protective factor across the lifecourse

➢ *Mental health is created where we live our everyday lives*

Adopting a Mental Health Promotion Approach

*"Mental health promotion is concerned with strengthening protective factors for good mental health and enabling access to skills, resources, and supportive environments that enhance equity and keep individuals and populations mentally healthy" (*Barry, Clarke, Petersen, Jenkins, 2019)
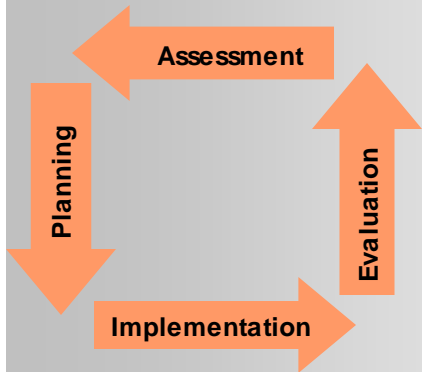
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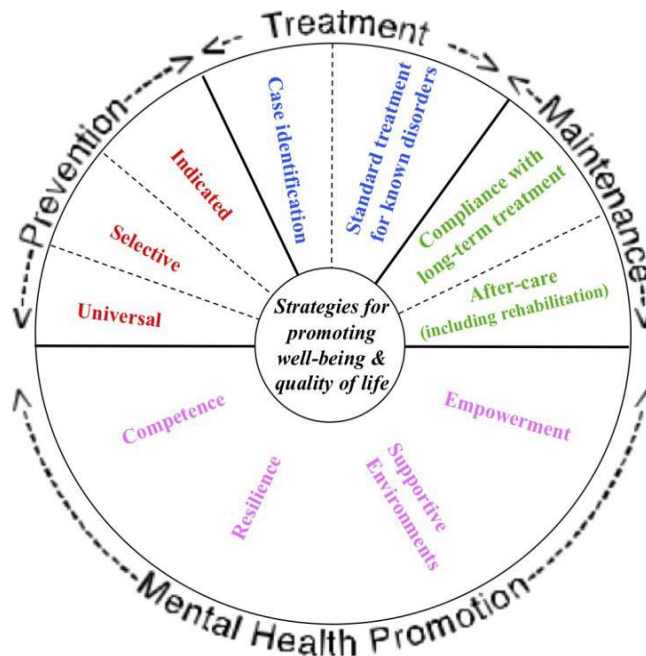
Barry, M.M. (2001) International Journal of Mental Health Promotion, 3(1) 25-34.
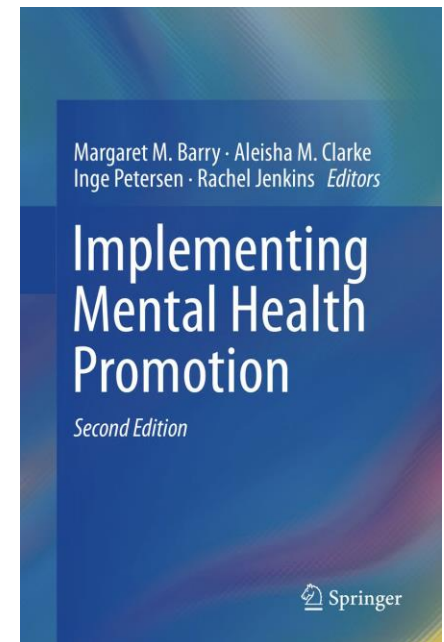
Health Promotion action areas

Build healthy public policy

Create supportive environments

Reorient health services

Strengthen community action

Develop personal skills

Assessment

Planning

Evaluation

Implementation

combined into Health Promotion strategies

Systems

policies

environment

organisation

community

person

Systems scale

micro - macro

Health Promotion Socio-Ecological Model (Ottawa Charter, WHO, 1986)

The process of enabling people to increase control over their health and the determinants of health

Health Promotion Principles (participation, empowerment, equity, social justice)

Principles of Mental Health Promotion

- Identifies the whole population as the target group

- Focus on protective factors for enhancing mental health and wellbeing

- Addresses the broad determinants of mental health
    - the social, physical, socio-economic and cultural environments of population groups and individuals

- Complementary approaches and integrated strategies at both individual and socio-environmental levels

- Involves intersectoral action extending beyond the mental health services

Addressing the Social Determinants of Mental Health

- Strengthen individuals and families
  - social and emotional wellbeing, life skills, sense of control

- Strengthen communities - social support, sense of connectedness and inclusion
  - supportive relationships, social participation

- Reorient health services to mental health promotion and prevention
  - mainstreaming mental health promotion

- Remove structural barriers at a societal level; culture, environment, economic and social policies
  - access to education, employment, healthy environments, role in society; respect, dignity, social justice - 'mental health in all policies' approach

➢ *comprehensive and universal actions across the life course, multiple sectors and settings*

(Socio-ecological model - adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

What Works?

- **Evidence-based** strategies that can be implemented and sustained at a reasonable cost, while generating clear health and social gains

  - **Lifecourse approach:** policies and interventions across the lifecourse from infancy to older age
  - **Settings approach:** actions that can be delivered in everyday settings or contexts and across delivery platforms - homes, schools, colleges, communities, workplaces, services, virtual settings
  - **Determinants of mental health approach**: reduce inequities

- Priority interventions for which there is evidence of effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and their feasibility in terms of cultural acceptability and capacity to be delivered by existing systems
  - series of evidence syntheses and briefings prepared for WHO and government agencies across high, middle and low income countries

Evidence Syntheses: Promoting Youth Mental Health

Kuosmanen, T., Keppler, T., Dowling, K. , Barry, M.M. (2022*). Evidence Synthesis of Impact of Mental Health Promotion: A systematic rapid evidence assessment of the effectiveness of mental health promotion interventions across the lifecourse*. Report produced for the Department of Health, Ireland.

Kuosmanen, T., Dowling, K. and Barry, M.M., (2020). *A Framework for Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in the European Youth Sector.* ERASMUS+ Project www.nuigalway.ie/hprc

Barry, Clarke, Morreale, & Field (2018). A review of the evidence on the effects of community-based programs on young people's social and emotional skills development. *Adolescent Research Review, doi 10.1007/s40894-017-0055-2*

Barry, M.M., Kuosmanen, T., Clarke, A.M. (2017). *Implementing Effective Interventions for Promoting Adolescents' Mental Health: A Review of the Evidence in the European Region. WHO European Regional Office*

Clarke, Morreale, Field, Hussein & Barry (2015). *What works in enhancing social and emotional skills development during childhood and adolescence*? Report for the Early Intervention Foundation & the UK Cabinet Office.

Petersen et al. (2015). Population and community platform interventions (pp183-200). In Patel, et al. (Eds.), *Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Disorders. Disease Control Priorities 3rd Edition.* The World Bank
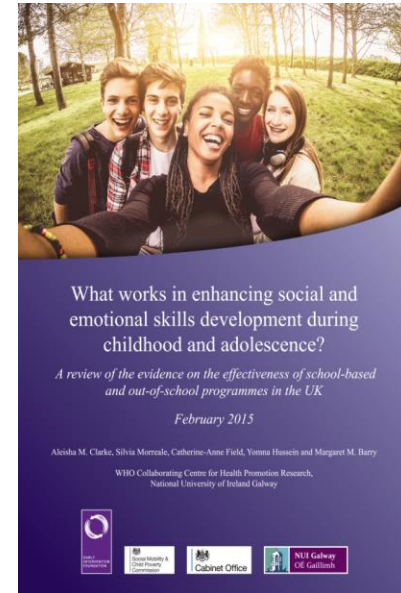
IUHPE Position Statement on Critical Actions for Mental Health Promotion (2021)

IUHPE UIPES
www.iuhpe.org

Critical Actions for

Mental Health Promotion

Position statement of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education, March 2021

https://www.iuhpe.org/images/IUHPE/Advocacy/IUHPE_Mental-Health_PositionStatement.pdf

8 PRIORITY AREAS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Promote infant and maternal mental health through integrating a focus on social and emotional development and positive mental health into early child development services including prenatal care, home visiting and parenting programmes.

Cultivate child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing through school education initiatives and whole-school approaches, including social and emotional learning programmes in preschool, school, and youth settings.

Implement parenting and family strengthening programmes that promote the emotional and behavioural functioning of school-going children and their parents.

Support mentally healthy workplaces by integrating mental health promotion into workplace health and safety policies and practices, including organizational change.

Initiate community empowerment programmes (e.g., community participation, volunteering, youth action, community microfinance and debt management paired with life skills training, and violence prevention/promotion of healthy relationships) to enhance social capital and environments that promote mental health and wellbeing across the life course.

Incorporate mental health promotion within health services through a focus on service users' mental health and wellbeing as part of routine primary health care and mental health services.

Enhance public awareness of ways of promoting positive mental health and reducing stigma associated with mental ill health through mental health literacy programming, campaigns and local community actions.

Adopt a 'mental health in all policies' approach to promote multi- and inter-sectoral policies and actions that create supportive environments for mental health and enhance equity and social justice.

Evidence Base for Promoting Population Mental Health and Wellbeing

- The promotion of mental health leads to lasting benefits for the improved health and wellbeing of people, their families and society (WHO, 2013)

- Compelling evidence that mental health promotion interventions
  - enhance protective factors for good mental health and wellbeing
  - reduce risk factors for mental and behavioural disorders
  - lead to lasting positive effects on a range of social and economic outcomes –> academic performance, employment, social functioning and health

- Convincing scientific, social and economic case for investing in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing (Knapp et al., 2011)

Evidence Base for Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Educational Settings

- Strong evidence base from the school setting on the positive impact on social, health and educational outcomes of universal skills-based social and emotional learning programmes delivered within a whole school approach

- Teaching and learning of foundational skills, attitudes and resources that are valuable for life
  - communicate effectively, work as a team member, empathy, creativity, problem-solving, emotional regulation, coping strategies, sense of control/efficacy

- Tiered delivery within a whole school approach
  - coordinated and sequenced approach across the curriculum, ethos and environment, school policies and community partnerships

- Evidence-based approaches that can be embedded into the core business of the school
  - embedded in educational policies and practices
  - teacher training and implementation support

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Core skills for social and emotional learning in schools for young people (CASEL, 2004, 2010, 2015)

- **Self-Awareness** - know yourself and others
  identify feelings, be responsible, recognize strengths

- **Self-Managemen**t - manage emotions,
  understand situations, set goals and plans,
  solve problems creatively

- **Social Awareness** - care for others
  show empathy, appreciate diversity

- **Relationships Skills** - communicate effectively,
  build relationships, negotiate fairly,
  refuse provocations, seek help

- **Responsible Decision-Making** - act ethically,
  appropriate social norms, respect others

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Higher Education

- Higher education is a unique setting for promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff – *'where people live, learn, work, play and love'*

  - critical skills for learning, work and life can be taught and learned
  - provides a socialising context that has a significant influence on the positive development of individuals, communities, societies and cultures
  - sense of citizenship and connectedness with community and broader society
  - transformative education – new knowledge and understanding, creativity, innovation

- WHO Health Promoting Universities and Colleges initiative
  - aims to create healthy working, learning and living environments for students and staff

  - ➢ *Integrating mental health into the culture, structure and processes of the university/college*

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Higher Education

- Building educational success on good mental health and wellbeing

    - improves academic performance, motivation and sense of connectedness
    - promotes student wellbeing and the development of social and emotional skills
    - maintains a healthy and productive work force
    - boosts student and staff performance
    - prevention and reduction of mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety and stress)
    - improves social behaviours and reduces problem behaviours (bullying, aggression, conflict, substance misuse)
    - reduces student drop-out rates and staff absenteeism
    - improves staff-student relationships, stress reduction and wellbeing
    - enhances the reputation and morale of the university/college

- Importance of education in addressing social and health inequities

Principles for Action: Okanagan Charter (2015)
An international Charter for Health Promoting Universities & Colleges

- **Use a settings and whole systems approach**
  - create conditions for good mental health and wellbeing

- **Ensure comprehensive and campus-wide initiatives**
  - integrated strategies that encompass a whole population, whole campus approach

- **Use participatory approaches and engage the voice of students and others**
  - meaningful involvement of all stakeholders – students and staff

- **Trans-disciplinary collaborations and cross-sector partnerships**
  - within and beyond the campus to support whole campus action

Principles for Action: Okanagan Charter (2015)
An international Charter for Health Promoting Universities & Colleges

- **Promote research, innovation and evidence-informed action**
  - expand the evidence base and knowledge translation for effective policies and practices

- **Build on strengths** – use an assets-based and empowering approach

- **Value local and indigenous communities' contexts and priorities**
  - recognise social and cultural diversity, inclusive of history, traditions, values and knowledge –refugees, Travellers, ethnic minorities international students

- **Act on existing universal responsibility**
  - human rights - social justice, equity, dignity, respect for diversity

Higher Education Healthy Campus Charter & Framework for Ireland 2020-2025

"A healthy campus adopts a holistic understanding of health, takes a whole campus approach and aspires to create a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health and wellbeing of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential" (p. 3)
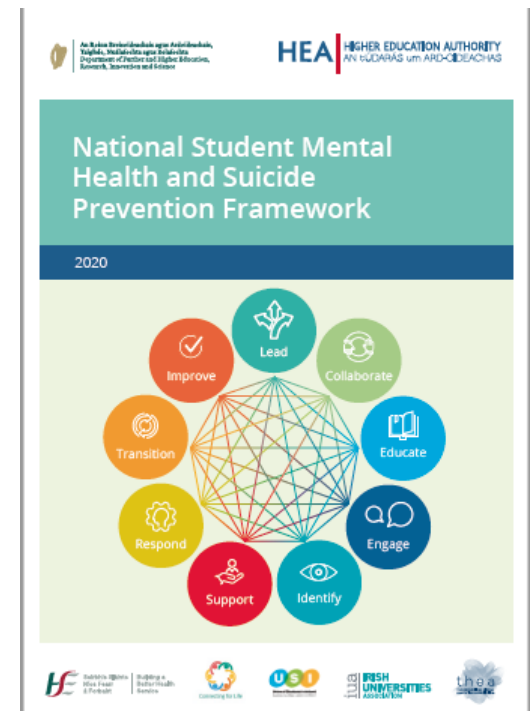
- **Whole Campus Approach**
  - Leadership, Strategy and Governance
  - Campus Environment (Facilities and Services)
  - Campus Culture and Communications
  - Personal and Professional Development

Higher Education Healthy Campus Charter & Framework for Ireland 2020-2025

- **Principles**
  - o Participation – engaging the wider campus community
  - o Partnership – working across sectors and structures
  - o Evidence-based – research, evaluation and knowledge translation
  - o Sustainability – embed mental health promotion into everyday policies, teaching and learning, and research innovation

- A healthy campus process – inclusive, coordinated approach to improving mental health and wellbeing

- ➢ *Integrate a focus on mental health and wellbeing into everyday operations, business practices and academic matters*

National Student Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Framework (HEA, 2020)

- A whole-institution comprehensive approach to promoting student mental health

  - Lead, Collaborate, Educate, Engage, Identify, Support, Respond, Transition

- **Leadership at a whole-sector level**

- **Whole-institution approach to mental health**
  - Strategic prioritisation
  - Investing in student engagement and success
  - Campus mental health task force

- **Addressing the sources of stress for students**
  - Academic performance, exams
  - Finance, Jobs, Accommodation, Future
  - Relationships, Family, Friends

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Higher Education Settings

Continuum of Support within a Whole Campus Approach

- **Universal approaches -** support for all students and staff
  - promoting access to life skills, resources and supportive environments for positive mental health and wellbeing

- **Targeted prevention approaches -** for students and staff at higher risk
  - reducing the risk of negative mental health outcomes
  - depression, anxiety, stress and suicide prevention
  - reduced behavioural problems, substance misuse, sexual health

- **Targeted intervention approaches -** students and staff with complex needs
  - counselling and mental health services, disability and learning supports
  - critical incidents and trauma support

- ➢ *Coordinated and sequenced approach*

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Higher Education Settings

Evidence-based approaches that can be embedded at every level into the core business of the university/college

- Culture - university/college mission, ethos, teaching and learning culture
- Physical and social environment - facilities, supports, student services
- Curriculum - curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences
- Relationships – staff-student, peers, student voice, partnerships, wider community supports
- Policy & Planning – participation, communication, evaluation

➢ *shift from discrete initiatives to organizational and system-level policies and practices that empower staff and students and create supportive higher education environments for promoting good mental health and wellbeing*

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing
in Higher Education Settings

- Integrating a focus on mental health and wellbeing within the overall educational policy
  - recognition of the interconnectedness of mental health, wellbeing and academic achievement
  - campus wide awareness and education - mental health literacy

- Leadership and Management
  - adopting a whole campus approach in practice – long-term commitment
  - embedding a focus on mental health and wellbeing in wider educational policies
  - supportive structures – policy and planning
  - supportive structures for high quality implementation
  - resources, training and CPD for staff

- *Effective partnerships – supportive policies and practices across the education and health sectors*

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Higher Education Settings

- **Integrating evidence-based approaches into mainstream practice**
  - **scaling-up what works -** effective implementation under real life conditions across diverse contexts
  - **equity** impact of interventions for diverse population groups of different ages, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, socio-economic status

- Concern with **process** in creating a mentally healthy campus – inclusive, coordinated approach, culturally appropriate, feasible and sustainable
  - co-production – student and staff engagement and implementer perspectives
  - promoting a sence of ownership, connectedness and beloning

- **Implementation** support – putting interventions into practice
  - resources, training, technical assistance, materials
  - organizational and workforce capacity, systems change

➢ *Effective coordination of evidence-based approaches across the continuum*

Capacity Development for Implementing Mental Health Promotion

- **Policie**s that will support the implementation and sustainability of mental health promotion in higher education settings

- **Practices** that will strengthen effective implementation
  - workforce capacity for integrating and scaling-up evidence-based approaches in the local context
  - implementation systems and support structures
  - delivery mechanisms for embedding mental health promotion practices into mainstream services and supports in a sustainable manner

- **Research** to advance and support effective action
  - expanding the evidence base – coordinated whole campus approach
  - investing in implementation research – bridging the 'know-do' gap

- **Mobilising student, staff and management engagement** – mental health and wellbeing becomes central to higher education and government policy

Creating mentally healthy higher education settings

Innovative & Sustainable Actions

empower staff and students and create supportive higher education environments that promote good mental health and wellbeing for all