health wellbeing Queensland

Queensland Mental Health Commission

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2029

CONSULTATION DRAFT

Queensland Government

Acknowledgement

Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Health and Wellbeing Queensland and the Queensland Mental Health Commission respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, winds, and waters where Queenslanders live, learn and work. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, representing distinctly different groups with unique cultures, histories, knowledges and connections to Country. We pay our respects to, and acknowledge, Elders, past and present, as they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and have taken on the responsibility to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, leaving a legacy for future Elders and leaders.

We acknowledge any Sorry Business that may be affecting individuals, families, and communities. We recognise and respect the common strengths demonstrated across Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In particular, we recognise the resourcefulness and enduring resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities.

Recognition of lived experience

We acknowledge the individual and collective contributions of Queenslanders with lived experiences of mental ill-health. It's through listening to those providing services, those who fund services, and most importantly, those who access services, that we continue to learn and grow. We acknowledge your experience and value your expertise, professionalism, dedication, and commitment. We thank you for your efforts to support quality outcomes for all Queenslanders. Every person's story we hear, every experience shared, informs us and helps develop our understanding of what is required to best meet the needs of Queenslanders and contribute towards improving their mental health and wellbeing.

Recognition of a multicultural and diverse Queensland

We recognise and support the Queensland Government's *Multicultural Recognition Act 2016* and Multicultural Queensland Charter (2017) and are committed to engaging in activities that support and develop health promotion to improve the health of all Queenslanders, regardless of culture, language, faith, or age.

Acknowledgements

This section will contain key acknowledgements in the final version of the Strategy.

Contents

Mental health and wellbeing: a priority for Queensland

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a 'state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.

The WHO also highlights that enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. **Every person has a right to wellbeing**.

Wellbeing is a growing area of research, yet the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered.[1] Academic definitions have taken many different approaches over the years, focussing on different dimensions.[1] The subjective nature of wellbeing has also been highlighted in the research.[2] Consultation feedback has reinforced this, reflecting that wellbeing is expressed differently by different people. However, it is clear that most definitions share common themes around feeling good, functioning well, and the importance of purpose, positive relationships and social connection.[3,2,4] Research also emphasises the need for definitions to centre on a state of equilibrium or balance, that can be affected by life events or challenges.[1] In the Queensland context, for the purpose of this Strategy, we use the following definition:

> "Wellbeing is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Wellbeing encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose. Focusing on wellbeing supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability. A society's wellbeing can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges."[5]

Wellbeing has been linked to success at professional, personal, and interpersonal levels, with individuals higher in wellbeing experiencing greater productivity in the workplace, more effective learning, increased creativity, more prosocial behaviours, and positive relationships.[6,7] Wellbeing has also been recognised as a metric essential to informing the success of a society. In 2023, the Australian Government began measuring 50 wellbeing indicators related to the categories of 'Healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous' to better inform policy making.[8]

Wellbeing and mental health are intrinsically linked — and a key element of holistic wellbeing is mental wellbeing. Individuals who care for their mental health and wellbeing are 8 times less likely to experience mental ill-health than those who don't.[9] Likewise, improving mental health and wellbeing in people who are diagnosed with a mental health condition makes recovery up to 7 times more likely and more effective.[10]

The evidence also demonstrates that the extent of high wellbeing and mental health vary widely across the Queensland community. Demographic differences and social inequalities, (including our age, sex, income, education and where we live) significantly impact life outcomes. These social determinants affect our health significantly and have a cumulative effect. Health inequities in Queensland are responsible for outcomes such as the 30-year gap in median age at death between some parts of the far north of the state and Southeast Queensland.[11] This inequity is also reflected in the prevalence of high or very high levels of psychological distress among Queensland adults, with reported rates two times higher for those in the most disadvantaged regions, compared to the least disadvantaged areas.[12] While the social determinants of health have a considerable influence on wellbeing and mental health, they sit outside an individual's control, and are largely beyond the influence of healthcare systems.[13,14]

Tackling inequity requires significant action beyond the health system to address the social determinants of health. Without this, entire population groups will continue to be disproportionately represented in ill-health statistics and will continue to experience poorer outcomes. For example, the prevalence of high or very high levels of psychological distress were found to be 50% higher among Australian women compared to men, across all age groups.[14]

We are living in unsettled times. The impacts of conflict, COVID-19, climate change and the cost of living are taking a toll on the wellbeing of our communities. For instance, average life satisfaction rates in Australia fell substantially during the pandemic and continue to remain lower than those recorded in October 2019.[15]

Having good mental health and wellbeing has numerous individual, social and economic benefits. The personal impacts of mental ill-health flow through families, workplaces, our communities, and economy. People living with severe mental illness tend to have a lower life expectancy and poorer physical health than the general population.[16] With 45.2% of Queenslanders aged 16–85 now experiencing mental illness in their lifetime, more needs to be done to help people achieve and maintain good mental health.[4] An Australian study of depression in the workplace also revealed that 32% of the workforce experienced some level of depression in 2009.[17]

These statistics demonstrate that a focus on achieving good mental health and wellbeing for our population is vital. The need for good mental health is recognised as a priority for Queensland. Over recent decades, there has been significant investment in the mental health treatment system. However, despite this investment, the rates of mental ill-health continue to increase.[18]

A different approach is needed. Protecting the wellbeing of our population — and where possible, preventing mental ill-health in the first place — is the key.

A growing body of research, expert consensus, and public support are driving a shift toward preventative approaches to the mental health needs of Queenslanders. Targeted investment in preventative health can yield substantial personal, community and economic benefit, strengthening social connections, improving educational and employment outcomes, and reducing healthcare costs. Investment in interventions that improve mental health and wellbeing have been shown to yield a return of over $8 for every dollar spent.[19] A report by KPMG and Mental Health Australia in 2018[19] demonstrated that an estimated $90 million in savings would be available in the short term if targeted investment in prevention and early intervention was increased.

Globally, policy and research also recommend a collective shift towards promoting wellbeing and preventing mental ill-health. Countries such as New Zealand, Scotland and Wales have already embraced this approach. By understanding the learnings from others, taking an evidence-informed approach, and listening to the specific needs of our communities, we can create a healthier and more equitable Queensland. Taking a holistic approach to mental health means promoting wellbeing, preventing mental illness, and acting early when people are in distress. These are the elements of a comprehensive approach that can drive good mental health and wellbeing for our population.

The Queensland Government is committed to achieving this. By taking a preventative approach and shifting the system toward promoting wellbeing and decreasing mental ill-health, it is possible to make true and meaningful change. This Strategy is developed in response to Recommendation 19 of the Mental Health Select Committee *Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*. The Queensland Government recognised the need for a "population-based Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy that works across human services portfolios and is aimed at improving community mental health and wellbeing," This Strategy delivers on that commitment.

Based on the findings of the Mental Health Select Committee Inquiry and early consultation with community and key government stakeholders, the following statements of purpose and vision have been drafted for this Strategy:

Vision
All Queenslanders thrive through mental health and wellbeing.
Purpose
The Strategy will work with the diverse needs and resources of our communities and people to drive evidence-informed action that reduces mental ill-health and increases population wellbeing across Queensland. This will be done through a broad wellbeing approach as it relates to and impacts mental health.

Reader note

The purpose and vision will be informed through consultation to ensure they set a clear objective for all of Queensland, while being broad enough to recognise the diverse strengths, needs and challenges of Queensland's communities.

Language matters

The words used to talk about mental health can have positive and negative impacts and require careful consideration. Stigma is a particularly harmful outcome of inappropriate language. The nature of mental health and wellbeing means that interchangeable terms are often used.

For clarity, the following definitions are used for the purpose of this Strategy. They are a combination of published and commonly understood definitions.

Mental health is about how you think, feel and act, and how you handle stress and relate to others. Having good mental health would mean feeling happy, managing stress, having good relationships with others, and coping with challenging times.

Mental ill-health refers to a wide spectrum of mental health experiences that affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with other people, and that vary in both severity and duration.[20]

This may range from occasional feelings of stress or sadness to more severe and persistent conditions. It may not always meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness and can affect anyone at various points in their lives.

An example of mental ill-health could be experiencing stress and anxiety due to difficulties at work or in personal relationships. This might manifest as feeling overwhelmed, having trouble concentrating, or experiencing physical symptoms like headaches or sleep disturbances. While these feelings and experiences can be distressing, they may not meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness such as generalised anxiety disorder unless they persist over time and significantly impair daily functioning.

Mental illness is a term used to describe conditions diagnosed by a medical professional that significantly affect how a person thinks, feels, and interacts with other people. Examples of mental illnesses diagnosed according to standardised criteria include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. [21]

Wellbeing is "a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Wellbeing encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose. Focusing on wellbeing supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability. A society's wellbeing can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges."[5]

Further key terms and plain English definitions are provided in the Glossary on page 20.

Statistics at a glance

Approximately 5.4% of Queenslanders are lonely, with almost 3 in 10 wanting to talk with people they know more often than they currently do[22]	Queenslanders in the most disadvantaged areas reported 1.5 times more psychological distress than those in the least disadvantaged areas (19.6% compared with 12.7%)[12]	45.2% of Queenslanders experience mental ill-health in their lifetime[23]
Mental ill health costs Australians around $200–220 billion per year[24]	For every $1 spent on promotion, prevention and early intervention, there is a return of over $8[19]	29% of young people in Queensland identify mental health as one of their highest concerns[25]
Queensland's population is rich in cultural diversity, encompassing over 180 languages and more than 110 religious beliefs from 220 countries[26]	Improving mental health and wellbeing in people with a diagnosed mental health condition makes recovery up to 7 times more likely and more effective[10]	Individuals who care for their mental health and wellbeing are 8 times less likely to experience mental ill-health than those who don't[9]
75% of all mental disorders emerge before an individual reaches 24 years of age[27]	Workplaces that support the wellbeing of their staff experience three times less absenteeism[28]	Depression and anxiety are the most reported mental health disorders[23]
1 in 4 First Nations people report having a current, long-term mental health or behavioural condition[29]	Having quality social connections both enhances wellbeing and protects against mental-ill health[30]	50% more women report high or very high psychological distress than males across all age groups[12]

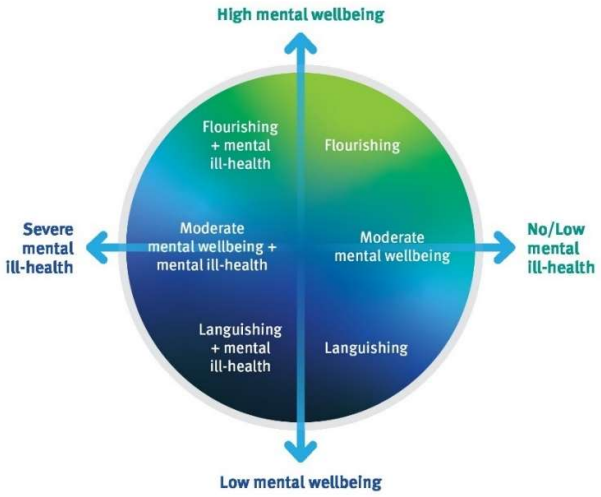
The relationship between mental health and wellbeing

Our experience of mental health and wellbeing is unique, complex and evolving. Most people have good mental health most of the time. However, many will experience the impacts of mental ill-health at some point in their lives. While some challenges can be temporary, others may persist. Good wellbeing can broadly be defined as feeling good emotionally, functioning well psychologically and socially, and having a sense of meaning and purpose in life.[31]

Evidence shows that each person can simultaneously experience varying degrees of wellbeing and mental ill-health, as represented by the dual-continuum model of mental health at Figure 1.[31] This means we all have the potential to experience some level of wellbeing, no matter our level of mental ill-health or diagnosis; at the same time, the absence of mental ill-health does not guarantee wellbeing.[31,32]

The experience of wellbeing and mental health are independent — though intertwined — and we need to focus on both to form holistic and effective approaches to achieving healthy and fulfilling lives. Guided by this scientific understanding, the Strategy's purpose recognises the need for a two-pronged approach, promoting high levels of wellbeing, while decreasing levels of mental ill-health, through prevention and early intervention activities.

Figure 1 – The dual-continuum of mental health[31]



Targeting the influences on mental health and wellbeing

The influences on our dynamic states of mental health and wellbeing are complex. While some factors are unique to us, such as our biological make-up and personality, individual wellbeing also sits within the context of collective and community wellbeing. This is shown in the Draft Wellbeing and Mental Health Model at Figure 2. This shows that our mental health and wellbeing are also subject to influences determined at a broader societal and community level, across the settings and conditions in which we live, work, learn, play, and build relationships.

As we support people to understand what good mental health and wellbeing look like, and what steps can be taken to achieve them, we also need to create the conditions that support mental health and wellbeing. For example, individual and broader community wellbeing is fostered through communities that have spaces and places that everyone can enjoy, where diversity is valued, and where people are supported by each other during difficult times.

Many of the conditions that support community and collective wellbeing also act to protect individual mental health, including the shared human need for social connection. From a social policy perspective, recognising these links enables us to identify and positively change the key influences on wellbeing. This enables us to then address the root causes of mental ill-health in a coordinated and effective way.

Figure 2 – Draft Wellbeing and Mental Health Model

Research has demonstrated the importance of specific positive influences (protective factors) and negative influences (risk factors) for mental health. A range of these is shown at Figure 3. Changing the balance of these key factors in favour of protection is crucial to drive improvements in wellbeing and prevent the onset of mental illness.[15]

Figure 3 –Protective and risk factors for mental health[13]

Protective Factors	Risk Factors
• Regular physical activity • High quality diet • Good sleep quality • Good social, emotional, and psychological skills • Secure attachment between parents/children • Positive school climate/ethos • Support for inclusion and diversity • Social support • Social cohesion, trust and social capital • Psychosocial safety in the workplace • Adequate income, employment, stable and affordable housing • Access to natural environments • Access to bodies of water (e.g., oceans, rivers, lakes etc)	• Physical inactivity • Low quality diet • Poor sleep quality • Excess screen time • Smoking • Problematic alcohol and/or drug use • Child abuse and neglect • Intimate partner violence and family violence • Bullying and cyberbullying • Unrealistic media portrayals of body image • Loneliness and social isolation • Stigma and discrimination • Job stress, other psychosocial hazards at work • Financial insecurity • Homelessness • Natural disasters • Climate change • Forced migration

To improve outcomes at a collective (or population) level, we need to work across government, within communities and on an individual basis to:

- identify and promote ways of working to change the balance of risk and protective factors and to build and protect population wellbeing
- educate people and communities so that these risk and protective factors are well known and understood, enabling good habits to be formed
- lead collaborative work to address the political, societal, economic, cultural, and environmental drivers of equity, to combat the inequitable experience of risk factors.

Pivoting to prevention

Over the past 30 years, rates of mental illness have increased, particularly among young people.[23,33,34] Diagnosed mental health conditions now account for 13% of the total level of disability and premature death in Australia, ranking fourth overall.[35] Strengthening our efforts towards preventative mental health measures has never been more important.

The current mental health system is unsustainably geared towards crisis and acute intervention. As mental ill-health still occurs in highly protective, low-risk environments, supporting people at the first sign of emerging mental health difficulties is critical to enhancing recovery and improving mental health outcomes. A collaborative model that offers support across and beyond the mental healthcare system and embeds wellbeing is the goal. The system must pivot to prioritising promotion, prevention and early intervention alongside treatment and support.

An integrated system of prevention and treatment can reduce the impacts of mental ill-health and save lives over and above what can be achieved through existing supports and services. This system shift will also optimise the benefits associated with high levels of individual and community mental health and wellbeing including:

- more adoption of positive health behaviours, improved physical health and longer life expectancy
- better relationships, increased pro-social behaviours and greater community and collective engagement
- reduced likelihood of experiencing a diagnosed mental health condition or addiction, and better recovery
- higher labour force participation, employee and student engagement, job performance and learning outcomes, and greater organisational productivity.

To target the influences of mental health and wellbeing, this Strategy will drive action across **three key focus areas:**

Collective Wellbeing	Drive a shared commitment to creating the social, cultural, and economic conditions that enable all Queenslanders to thrive, and lead collaboration across systems, sectors and government to prioritise wellbeing and mental health.
Community Wellbeing	Build on community strengths to promote wellbeing and protect mental health.
Individual Wellbeing	Equip Queenslanders to support their own and others' mental health and wellbeing.

Key insights and opportunities

Wellbeing is influenced by many factors. Research and data inform where to focus and highlight relevant opportunities to promote, protect and enhance wellbeing. The Strategy will consider key life stages and settings. This recognises the need to target actions towards specific needs of specific population groups. For example, what keeps a child well, will be different to what keeps a teenager well, which will be different for an older person. Similarly, a first-time mother will have some differences to a mother with adult children. Key settings reflect those different places such as the home, workplace, school, or sporting club where different support options and risks may be present. To achieve wellbeing outcomes at the collective, community, and individual levels we need to listen and learn from key population groups and tailor approaches accordingly.

Ages and life stage transitions

Placeholder for community input
Mental health and wellbeing are important at every stage of life, spanning from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to older age, including the transitional phases in between. Throughout life's journey, and as people transition between these stages, it's vital to have appropriate approaches and support systems in place to nurture wellbeing. The final Strategy will explore this further.

Key populations:

Placeholder for community input
We are talking to key population groups in the community as we develop the Strategy. We want to understand their strengths and what's important to them and identify key areas where we can focus to improve overall wellbeing. This information will be included in the final Strategy.

Stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. However, there are opportunities to develop informed approaches, particularly through people with a lived experience, and their families and carers.

Reducing stigma is a priority under the Queensland Government's:

- Shifting minds: The Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, and Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2023–2028
- Achieving balance: The Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2022–2027
- Every life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019–2029

Strategy

Placeholder for community input
This Strategy supports this work and will highlight further opportunities to improving wellbeing by reducing stigma and discrimination.

Developing the Strategy

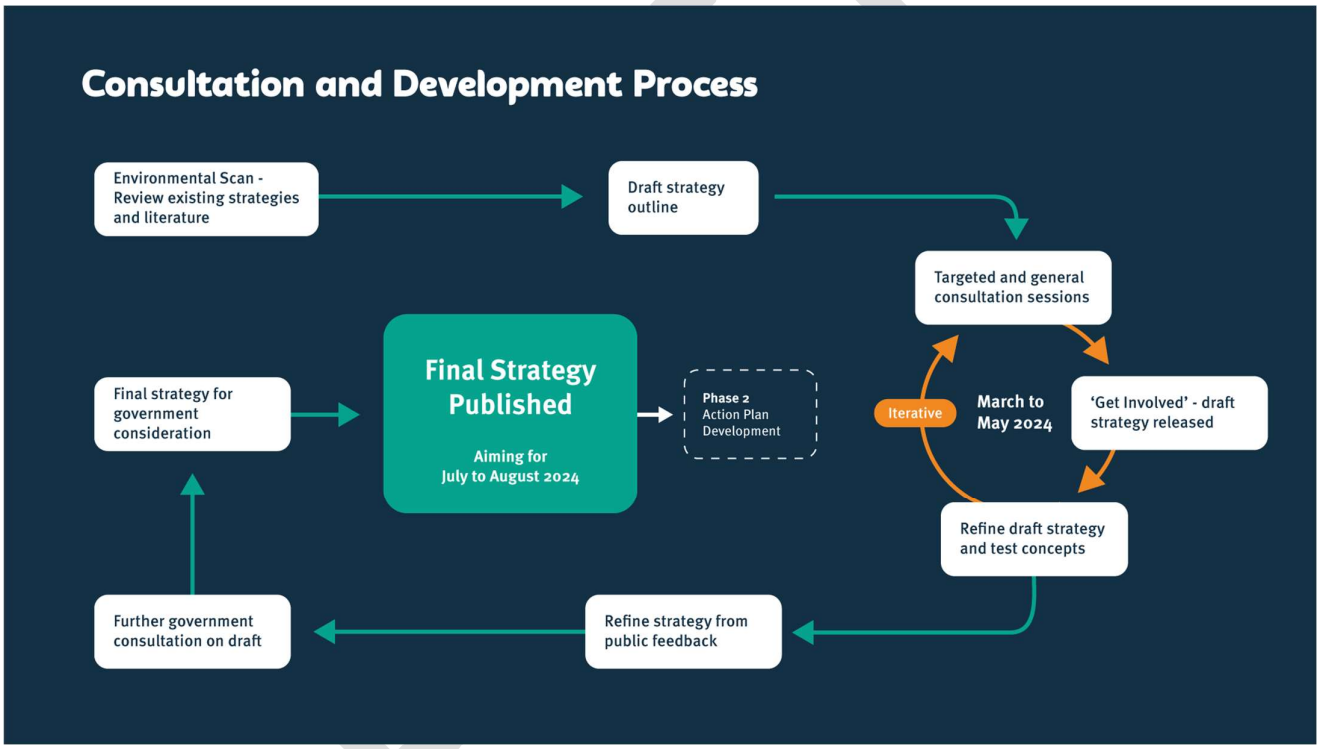
Mental Health Select Committee inquiry

The Strategy has been developed in response to Recommendation 19 of the Mental Health Select Committee Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders. This recommendation highlighted the need for a comprehensive population-based strategy emphasising prevention, promotion, and early intervention to improve community mental health and wellbeing.

Health and Wellbeing Queensland is partnering with the Queensland Mental Health Commission to lead the Strategy.

Development process

The Strategy is being developed through a range of consultation approaches, research, reviews, and expert advice to build a comprehensive understanding of the barriers, opportunities, and priorities for the Strategy. The diagram below depicts the current process being undertaken. As described in '*next steps'*, the planned phase two aims to create an action plan with tangible outcomes and activities that align to the framing of this Strategy.



Government context

This Strategy does not exist in isolation, and there is already progress being made to enhance Queenslanders' mental health and wellbeing through holistic approaches and support for individuals, families, and communities.

The Strategy builds on and strengthens existing plans and frameworks while prioritising efforts to promote, protect and enhance Queenslanders' wellbeing. Key Queensland Government strategies and how they contribute to the broader government policy context are listed below:

Strategy	Strengthening mental health and wellbeing together
Shifting minds: The Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, and Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2023–2028	A plan to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by focusing on preventing and reducing the impact of mental ill-health, problematic alcohol and other drug use, and suicide.
Achieving balance: The Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2022–2027	A sub-plan of Shifting minds 2023–2028, this plan aims to prevent and reduce problematic use of alcohol and other drugs.
Better Care Together: A plan for Queensland's state-funded mental health, alcohol, and other drug services until 2027	Better Care Together guides expanded services across the continuum and lifespan, and promotes more comprehensive treatment, harm reduction, care and support across our hospitals and community.
Every life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019–2029	A sub-plan of Shifting minds 2023–2028, this plan aims to create and support a healthy and inclusive Queensland where everyone can access the support they need, achieve positive mental health and wellbeing, and live their lives with meaning and purpose.
Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022–2025: A plan focused on strengthening the fabric of Queensland's communities.	The goal of the Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022–2025 is to make Queensland's communities stronger and more connected. By doing this, the plan aims to help people become stronger, feel like they belong, and feel happier.

Other initiatives with links to this Strategy are presented in Appendix 1

Strategic Framework

Driving principles

The principles of this Strategy will support our collective actions.

Collaborative

As Queenslanders, we have a rich tapestry of strengths across government, community groups, community service providers, individuals with lived experience, cultural leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and our young people.

The Strategy will embrace the unique contributions of people and communities through collaboration. It will place an emphasis on community engagement and supporting self-determination among First Nations communities.

Evidence-informed and evidence generating

Decisions should be made by incorporating both research findings and practical knowledge based on reliable information. There is a need to prioritise setting up strong systems to collect, generate, analyse and report data about wellbeing and the overall population. This helps us keep track of how well our efforts are working.

Research is also key to finding new and better ways to promote wellbeing and prevent mental ill-health.

Inclusive and equitable

Recognising the diverse needs of all populations, regardless of where they live or their circumstances, it is important to be inclusive, and ensure that everyone has the best opportunity to stay mentally well. From Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, individuals living with disability, LGBTIQI+ individuals, people at different life stages, those living in rural or remote areas, and those facing socio-economic challenges, we aim to meet people where they are at on their wellbeing journey.

This Strategy will focus on equity and work to address the needs of priority populations to ensure we improve the wellbeing of all Queenslanders.

Strength based and community-led

Recognising the diversity and uniqueness of communities, a tailored place-based approach should be embraced, rather than a one-size-fits-all method. The unique strengths of existing systems, services, communities, and individuals should be built upon to promote mental health and wellbeing. This collaborative approach drives change from within, fostering sustainable solutions as communities are the experts of their own circumstances and lives.

Theory of change

If we shift our thinking, systems, and resources towards a focus on wellbeing

> **And work together** as a community to support people's wellbeing in the places where we live, work, play, learn and build relationships, and empower people to look after their own and others' wellbeing
>
> > **We will contribute** to improved individual, community and collective wellbeing, and a reduction in the prevalence and impact of mental ill-health among Queenslanders. This benefits individuals, families, communities, and the economy.

Focus areas

This Strategy is taking a comprehensive approach to promoting wellbeing and preventing mental ill-health for Queensland's 5.45 million residents.[36] The focus areas for the Strategy are the pillars for action to improve overall wellbeing at the collective, community and individual level. This is where efforts should be concentrated to realise the vision of a thriving and mentally healthy Queensland.

Focus area 1: Collective Wellbeing

Drive a shared commitment to creating the social, cultural, and economic conditions that enable all Queenslanders to thrive, and lead collaboration across systems, sectors and government to prioritise wellbeing and mental health.

Establishing a system that prioritises promotion and prevention, thereby enhancing outcomes for individuals and communities, is a collective responsibility. It requires several key elements.

Objective 1.1 Create a whole-of-government approach to address the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified as essential for thriving.

Meaningful change requires collaboration across sectors and systems to boost collective wellbeing. These strong partnerships leverage the strengths of each sector for joint action, such as collaborating with cultural leaders and those with lived experience, to enrich understanding and leadership.

Dedicated funding for mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention is essential for ongoing success. It's crucial to separate this funding from resources allocated for mental healthcare treatment. By securing sustainable funding, initiatives can provide support to proactively manage wellbeing, prevent crises, and intervene early when needed, leading to better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Oversight and leadership will be required from within government agencies who will advocate for evidence-based interventions in wellbeing, ensuring access to services, and coordinating key initiatives under the Strategy.

Objective 1.2 Develop workforce capability and capacity across systems and sectors

Developing capability and capacity across mental health and broader human services workforces, will underpin better mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Embedding the skills and knowledge to drive prevention, early intervention, and promotion, is essential for better mental health outcomes for individuals and communities.

It's also important to ensure that workplaces prioritise employee wellbeing, remove stigma, and protect mental health. Overall, supported and supportive workforces are critical to creating a society that prioritises wellbeing.

Objective 1.3 Strengthen our approach to data, research, and innovation

Research and data play a critical role in improving population wellbeing and preventing mental ill-health. Investigation of the most effective ways to protect and promote wellbeing should include areas that are currently under-researched, including nutrition, sleep, and creative interventions.[37] There is also an existing evidence base that needs to be translated to policy and practice. The impact of social media is an important area for investigation, considering both its positive contributions and negative effects and their influence on wellbeing.[28]

A broader focus is needed, beyond individual approaches, which considers community connections, social policies, and other factors. Prioritising research for innovative population-level interventions is crucial. Moreover, evidence-informed approaches that integrate lived experiences need to be valued, as this not only enriches understanding but also generates new data.

Please note that example actions will be further developed and refined through community consultation, as part of the Strategy's development process.

Focus area 2: Community Wellbeing

Build on community strengths to promote wellbeing and protect mental health

Communities play a central role in shaping our overall wellbeing. Strong communities foster a sense of belonging, provide opportunities for growth, and are often best placed to address the wellbeing needs of individuals.[38]

Objective 2.1 Work with communities to build on their strengths, and lead their own solutions

When communities unite to focus on their strengths and leverage what they have, they become the driving force behind change. Strong communities are those where residents are active participants and leaders of their own wellbeing journey, and which foster a sense of belonging, cohesion, purpose, and connection. For example, community centres might organise mental health workshops, community gardens, or neighbourhood initiatives, ensuring that everyone has opportunities to contribute and benefit — and transforming wellbeing outcomes.

Objective 2.2 Prioritise and embed wellbeing emphasis across everyday settings

Placeholder for community input

The Strategy will include a discussion of the importance of everyday settings such as schools, workplaces and local neighbourhoods to wellbeing. This will include discussion of the vital role of 'third places', i.e., places outside of home, work and school where people gather, connect and socialise. It will also highlight Queensland's rich tapestry of community centres, sports clubs, faith-based institutions, and other settings such as online.

The Strategy will aim to include information on how these places create connections, foster a sense of belonging, and support a repository of wellbeing resources.

It will also include a discussion of the role of families and parents and how these settings can support their wellbeing.

Objective 2.3 Value and invest in social and emotional wellbeing responses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a deep understanding of wellbeing, valuing connections to family, community, land, culture, and spirituality, which form essential support systems.[39]

Central to our approach is collaboration and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Their wisdom and insights will inform the approaches that best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Example Actions

Please note that example actions will be further developed and refined through community consultation, as part of the Strategy's development process.

Focus area 3: Individual Wellbeing

Equip Queenslanders to support their own and others' mental health and wellbeing.

Individuals play a key role in shaping their own wellbeing as they are the experts of their lives. It's important that individuals are equipped to strengthen their own wellbeing and support the wellbeing of others. This includes enhancing understanding of wellbeing and fostering strong relationships and connections.

Objective 3.1 Strengthen efforts to equip Queenslanders with mental health understanding and literacy.

Good mental health literacy involves supporting oneself and others to: promote mental health; recognise the signs of mental ill-health; and know when to seek help. It allows informed decision-making and effective support, contributing to community wellbeing. Knowing where to find support is the first step. In order to find support, accessible information is required, tailored to needs (for example, culturally and linguistically diverse communities or groups experiencing disabilities). Mental health literacy helps individuals address concerns, reduce stigma, and promote wellbeing. Normalising conversations and improving access to accurate information about mental health are essential for transformative shifts in attitudes and better outcomes.

Objective 3.2 Support individuals to engage in wellbeing activities to promote and protect their mental health.

It's essential to equip individuals with the knowledge and motivation to prioritise their own wellbeing. When people know how to take care of their wellbeing, they not only thrive, but also foster connections, purpose, and a sense of belonging for others in their community.[38]

Individuals can gain the knowledge and motivation to look after their wellbeing in many ways, for example through sports, artistic expression, volunteering, or connecting with nature.

Mindful choices in nutrition and sleep habits positively influence overall mental health too.[37] Life transitions also significantly affect wellbeing, highlighting the importance of tailored support and early interventions to promote positive coping skills and strategies across the lifespan.[40]

Objective 3.3 Resource and promote social participation and connection to foster support and belonging.

Humans are social beings and positive relationships are essential to wellbeing. The Strategy will focus on initiatives that help people build strong, supportive, and respectful relationships, expand social networks and improve social supports.

Social prescribing involves healthcare providers recommending non-medical activities or interventions, such as physical activity, arts programs, volunteering, cultural activities, or connections to nature, to empower individuals to find belonging, purpose, and build social connections. Encouraging individuals to engage in these activities not only strengthens wellbeing but also contributes to the vibrancy and cohesion of our communities. For example, volunteering fosters fulfillment and community connection, promoting wellbeing and preventing mental ill-health.

Example Actions

Please note that example actions will be further developed and refined through community consultation, as part of the Strategy's development process.

Next Steps

Strategic governance

The final Strategy will be informed by our consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. This will provide the strategic framing for any future action.

We will then collaborate with government and the community to implement the Strategy with actions and initiatives spanning the three focus areas. There will be opportunities to engage on development of the plan, which will also identify lead agencies and key deliverables across the five years of the Strategy.

A leadership group will oversee implementation, ensuring that the guiding principles and objectives of the Strategy remain paramount.

Evaluation and monitoring

Understanding the Strategy's impact on the wellbeing of Queenslanders is vitally important. It is recognised that there are significant gaps in the current ability to measure wellbeing in Queensland. To this end, Government agencies will work the Health and Wellbeing Centre for Research Innovation at The University of Queensland to develop a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring framework that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative measures.

This framework will both measure data and assess the impacts of the promotion and prevention efforts of the Strategy. This structured approach will involve setting wellbeing indicators, measuring outcomes, tracking progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation plan. It will also assist in effectively responding to the needs of different population groups.

Glossary

Early intervention	Early intervention is identifying and addressing mental ill-health as soon as it arises, ideally at the earliest signs or symptoms, and taking action to prevent it from worsening. This includes promptly recognising signs, offering timely care and support to lessen their impact, duration, and likelihood of recurrence, and promoting recovery and wellbeing.
Mental health	Mental health is about how you think, feel and act, and how you handle stress and relate to others. Having good mental health would mean feeling happy, managing stress, having good relationships with others, and coping with challenging times.
Preventative mental health	Prevention focuses on stopping the onset of mental health conditions by addressing their root causes so they do not develop in the first place. At the same time, it's about enhancing factors that help keep our minds healthy.
Mental health promotion	Mental health promotion focuses on helping people to learn how to look after their mental health and wellbeing, while also working together to make our shared environments more positive to support collective wellbeing.
Mental ill-health	Mental ill-health refers to a wide spectrum of mental health experiences that affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with other people, and that vary in both severity and duration.[21] This may range from occasional feelings of stress or sadness to more severe and persistent conditions. It may not always meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness and can affect anyone at various points in their lives. An example of mental ill-health could be experiencing stress and anxiety due to difficulties at work or in personal relationships. This might manifest as feeling overwhelmed, having trouble concentrating, or experiencing physical symptoms like headaches or sleep disturbances. While these feelings and experiences can be distressing, they may not meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness such as generalised anxiety disorder unless they persist over time and significantly impair daily functioning.
Mental illness	A mental illness is a term used to describe conditions diagnosed by a medical professional that significantly affect how a person thinks, feels, and interacts with other people. Examples of mental illnesses diagnosed according to standardised criteria include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. [21]
Population health	This approach focuses on the health of whole communities or groups, not just individuals. Population health efforts aim to improve the overall health of communities, prevent disease, and promote wellbeing by focusing on potential influences on health, such as social, economic, environmental and cultural factors.[41]
Wellbeing	"Wellbeing is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Wellbeing encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose. Focusing on wellbeing supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability. A society's wellbeing can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges."[5]

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Appendix 1

It is essential to recognise that our efforts are part of a broader tapestry of strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing wellbeing. These interconnected initiatives, at the national, state and local levels, complement and reinforce the work we are undertaking.

National

- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031
- Beyond Urgent: National LGBTIQ+ Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021–2026
- Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration
- Implementation Plan for the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration (pending)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (pending)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- National Drug Strategy 2017–2026
- National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and the Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: Queensland
- National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan
- National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan
- National Mental Health Workforce Strategy (pending)
- National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy (pending)
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023
- The National Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce Development Guidelines
- Vision 2030 for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Australia

State

- Achieving balance: The Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2022–2027
- Better Care Together: A plan for Queensland's state-funded mental health, alcohol and other drug services to 2027
- Communities 2032 Strategy and Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022–25
- Every life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019–2029
- Queensland Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Service Delivery Framework
- Queensland Multicultural Policy: Our story, our future and Queensland Multicultural Action Plan 2022–23 to 2023–2024
- Queensland Strategy for the prevention of obesity (draft)
- Queensland Women and Girl's Health Strategy 2032
- Regional mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and suicide prevention plans (developed by Primary Health Networks and Hospital and Health Services)

Local

In Queensland, there are 77 local governments, each playing a crucial role in fostering community wellbeing. Many of these local governments have established policies and strategies dedicated to supporting the health and prosperity of their residents.

To learn more about the initiatives undertaken by your local government, we invite you to explore their website.

Related State Social, Economic, and Health Context

- Community Support and Services Committee Report No. 14, 57th Parliament, Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland, Queensland Government Response

- Domestic and family violence prevention Strategy 2016–2026
- Future Directions for an Age-Friendly Queensland
- Gambling harm minimisation plan for Queensland 2021–25
- Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022–2032
- HEALTHQ32: A vision for Queensland's health system
- Homes for Queenslanders
- Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–2025
- Jobs Queensland: Future skills. Future work. Future Queensland
- Leading healing our way: Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Strategy 2020–2040
- Local Thriving Communities Action Plan
- Making Tracks Together – Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equity Framework
- Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2024-2027
- Our way: A generational Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017–2037 and action plans
- Prevent.Support.Believe. Queensland's Framework to address Sexual Violence
- Queensland Corrective Services Mental Health Strategy 2022–2027
- Queensland Housing Strategy (2017–2027)
- Queensland Youth Strategy (pending)
- Queensland's Disability Plan 2022–27: Together, a better Queensland
- Queensland's Path to Treaty
- The Queensland Government's objectives for the community (Queensland: Good Jobs, Better Services, Great Lifestyle)