Our Mental Health Strategy

Thriving together at CDU

2022 – 2026

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

Contents

Acknowledgement

Charles Darwin University acknowledges and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging of the Larrakia people where the main Darwin campus is located, along with our campuses on lands of the Arrernte of Alice Springs, the Jawoyn, Wardaman and Dagomon of Katherine, the Warumungu of Tennant Creek, and our interstate campuses on lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation of Sydney and the Kulin Nation of Melbourne. CDU also acknowledges its footprint is on the lands of many nations of Aboriginal custodians including the Kungarakan people of Batchelor and Adelaide River, Yolngu of northeast Arnhem land, and the Tiwi people.

We acknowledge First Nations Peoples' long history of sustaining their communities and environments over thousands of years. They are the First Educators and First Innovators and the custodians of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning that improve our local, national, and global communities.

Document Purpose

'We will be Australia's most connected university by being courageous and making a difference in the Northern Territory, Australia and beyond'.
CDU Vision 2021-2026

This document grows from the University-wide strategic vision to improve the CDU student experience and to enhance student success over the next four years. A CDU strategic goal is to **Create a student experience where every student can connect and succeed** (Strategic Plan Goal 6).

The following pages articulate a student-focused, whole-of-university strategy for nurturing and supporting the wellbeing and mental health of the CDU student community. It will guide and enable coordinated, co-designed, and collaborative action towards implementing the Safer Community Framework Initiative and ensuring that CDU takes a continuous improvement approach to supporting the mental health of the CDU community.

The focus of this strategy is to improve the mental health wellbeing of students. CDU staff are crucial to this and are referenced throughout the document as important advocates and influencers to support positive mental health messages and activities for students.

What is Mental Health?

'Mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It influences our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development'. (WHO, 2022)

Our mental health influences, and can be understood and expressed through our behaviours, emotions, thoughts, learning and work, and social relationships.

'Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes'. (WHO, 2022)

Academic success flows from wellbeing

We aim to build and resource resilience and wellbeing of the student population through a whole-of-university approach strategy that:

– promotes student mental health awareness, empowerment, help-seeking, belonging and connectedness.

– incorporates a prevention, preparation, response, and recovery support and service provision model.

– guides trauma-informed ways of responding to and recovering from emotional distress.

– supports and aligns with staff focused strategy, driven by CDU People and Culture to enhance the health, wellbeing and sustainability of its community and enable people to achieve their full potential.

Implementing this strategy will involve the community enacting the CDU values of Courage, Kindness, Openness, Innovation, Leadership.

Business Case

A Mental Health Strategy influences and is influenced by the whole university

Recommendation 8 provided in the Higher Education Standards Panel *Final Report - Improving retention, completion, and success in higher education* (2017) recommended that Australian universities developing a Mental Health Strategy and implementation plan was good practice and an important and essential first step to address high rates of mental illness or emotional distress in higher education students' experience.

The report recommended the inclusion of:

1. Institutional approaches to mental health and wellbeing

2. Assistance for students and staff

3. Specific interventions for students and staff with mental health issues

Mental health challenges and emotional distress can be a factor influencing attrition and success. A mental health strategy and implementation plan mitigate mental health related risk, improve retention and engagement of both students and staff and continue to grow CDU's reputation as Australia's most connected university by being courageous and making a difference in the Northern Territory, Australia and beyond'.
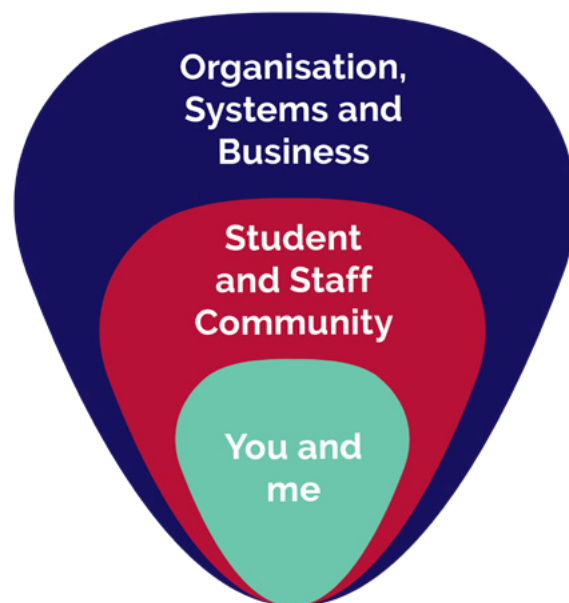
Context

A collaborative, inclusive and co-designed whole-of-university approach to student wellbeing is an avenue for addressing identified drivers of attrition and student success:

Academic staff remain the biggest influencing factor of a student's experience – in both the positive and the negative.

Students remain dissatisfied with the timeliness and quality of feedback about assignments.

For courses that are highly dependent on placements, their availability and administration remain key issues for students.

The on-campus experience at CDU needs improving, with low social engagement, a lack of a "sense of belonging" and limited opportunities for peer learning.

The Mental Health Strategy aligns with the CDU SES Core Plan 2022-2026 approaches for addressing these drivers.

A snapshot of CDU student engagement, equity, and diversity

Some CDU student population characteristics are distinctive in the sector. The following information summarises student profile:

TAFE	Profile characteristic	HE
99% on campus	Study mode	48% on campus, 81% online
57% mature aged (25 or over)	Age	77% mature age (25 or over)
25% First Nations	First Nations	7% First Nations
2% International	International	15% International
41% Female	Gender	71% Female
83% NT	Residency (term time)	32% NT

CDU has a long history of online learning and physical representation across Australia and internationally. CDU students come from increasingly diverse backgrounds with equally diverse experiences. Students can experience challenges and stress related to the requirements of formal study, finding information, and growing both academic skills and digital literacies. The relative isolation of online students is strongly correlated with poor help-seeking behaviour, making online students less likely to access support than if they had strong peer relationships or spent more time in a campus environment. (CDU 2022 - SES Core Plan 2022-2026) There has also been an upward trajectory of domestic students growing a preference for accessing learning via digital channels.

As well as study, CDU students have multiple demands and stressors in their lives that influence the time, energy, and capacity to engage in study. Even when well supported, highly engaged in the learning experience and connected with their peers, the majority of CDU TAFE and HE students must prioritise work and family commitments. They balance study, work, family, and financial commitments to a much greater extent than a traditional school leaver cohort, often resulting in frequent breaks from study, leading to CDU's high number of intermittent learners. (CDU 2022 - SES Core Plan 2022-2026)

The Orygen University Mental Health Framework (2020) reports that there are additional student cohorts who have been identified as being at increased risk of mental ill-health including young people (aged up to 25 years), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students, students who identify as LGBTIQ+, students with physical disabilities, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural/ regional students, law and medicine students, PhD students, and students with existing mental health conditions. (Orygen, 2020)

The staff of CDU are an additional cohort who can influence and be influenced by the mental health of the university community. Through People and Culture activity CDU is committed to providing a coordinated, holistic approach to employee health and encourages staff to utilise mental health information and services to seek support and to participate in programs and initiatives that are offered. Many staff also engage and participate in the CDU community as students.

With ambitious goals to double the number of international students by 2024, CDU is on track to exceed these targets and diversify the international student population both in terms of nationality mix and programs of study (CDU Global Enabling Plan 2022-2024). However, with increased cultural diversity comes the challenge of effectively supporting the mental health and wellbeing of culturally diverse students. Addressing mental health challenges in a culturally relevant manner is crucial to creating a strong culture of care and concern for student wellbeing.

CDU has joined as an inaugural member of the 2022 Welcoming Universities pilot program and demonstrates CDU's commitment to increase cultural diversity and inclusion among students and staff. The Welcoming Universities initiative will enable participating institutions to benchmark their cultural diversity and inclusion practices across their entire operation. Institutions will also be supported to create a sense of belonging for all students and staff. These activities will align, coordinate, and collaborate with those undertaken to meet the objectives of this Student Mental Health Strategy. As will the university's activity in relation to membership with Australian Network on Disability, the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) 'Racism. It Stops with me.' campaign and Pride in Diversity.

Scale and Scope

This strategy will be implemented over the next four years using a whole-of-university approach. The implementation of both short and longer-term initiatives will be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. A formal review will be conducted annually to determine what longer- term initiatives are required based on the University's needs.
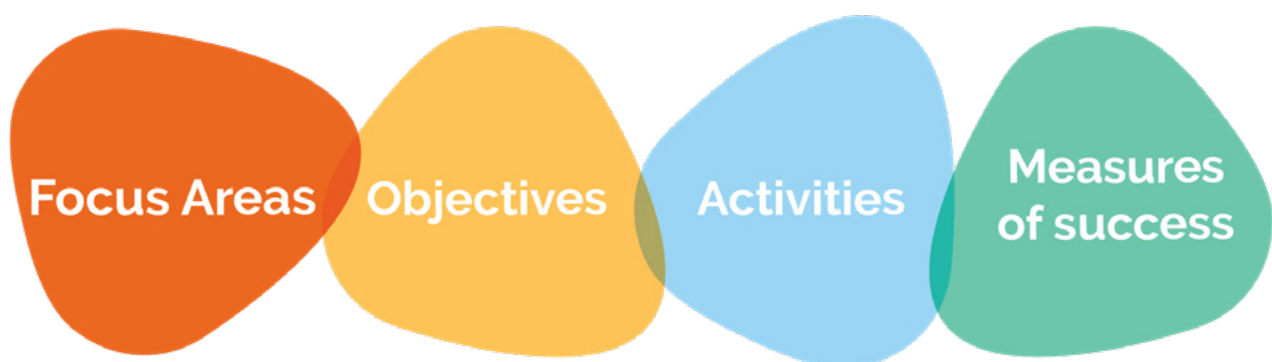
Approval Authority

The approval authority for this document is the Vice-Chancellor and President.

The Strategy

The CDU Mental Health Strategy 2022-2026 identifies 3 Focus Areas with associated Objectives, Activities and Measures of Success.

The strategy will span student life and experience across all CDU campuses, online and in residential facilities. There will be specific activities for supporting the unique contexts of First Nations, International, and Domestic learner cohorts who are engaging in HE and VET study either full-time, part-time, or intermittently. Targeted activities to make university attendance a protective factor for the mental health of students, with neurodiversity or disability, or belonging to LBGTIQ+ communities will also be undertaken.

Strategic Focus Areas

1. Governance, Data, and Impact

Objective:

CDU uses evidence-informed innovation and improvement to support staff understanding, knowledge, and skills for ensuring mental health and wellbeing approaches are student-centred, collaborative, and coordinated. CDU leverages data to demonstrate impact and guide strategic investments to support prevention, preparation, response, and recovery interventions.

Activities:

a. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and other Gaps Analysis consultations.

b. Establish a wellbeing and communications governance framework to ensure whole-of-university strategy development and implementation, policies, business practices and communications incorporate mental health and wellbeing considerations.

c. Create self-reflection reporting tool and surveys to seek feedback and input into strategy implementation and review.

Measures of success:

University policies and practices incorporate mental health and wellbeing and accommodate the needs of students and staff in reaching their study and work goals.

Demonstrated through:

– Developed Wellbeing and Communications Governance Framework

– Self-reflection reporting tool and survey responses

– Baseline data collected for determining future strategic activities and improvements

– Reduction in students with mental health related themes who have Learning Success Plan (LSP) transitioning to Learning Management Plans (LMP) in subsequent semesters

2. Understanding, Access, and Accountability

Objective:

CDU provides mental health support access points throughout the student experience so students can find and use best-fit resources at the right time and based on their specific context and circumstances.

Activities:

a. Stakeholder collaboration to identify diversity, intersectionality and trajectories of student experience, challenges and successes and implement no-wrong door referral pathways.

b. Undertake a Counselling Service Review to enhance safe, sustainable, scalable, and supportive service provision with an efficient business model.

c. Wellbeing workshops and curricular infusion of mental health and wellbeing themes to improve student mental health literacy, wellbeing strategies, and help-seeking.

Measures of success:

Students' mental health literacy and capacity to access resources, services, and information increases.

CDU communities' mental health literacy and capacity to support students' access to resources, services, and information increases.

Demonstrated through:

– Self-reflection reporting tool and survey responses

– Implementation Plan for actioning immediate, short-, mid- and long-term recommendations created based on report findings

– Increased participation in prevention, preparation, response, and recovery focused interventions

– NPS for targeted services and activities

3. Belonging, Connection, and Agency

Objective:

Attending CDU is a protective factor for student mental health. CDU fosters a culture of inclusion and belonging and values our diversity to promote connectedness and collaborative student-led actions. Our actions embrace students' diverse experiences, needs, perspectives, and contexts. Actions also specifically acknowledge and address vulnerabilities and known risks to mental health, and other barriers to participation and engagement.

Activities:

a. Whole-of-university interpersonal skill development opportunities to improve community confidence, capacity, and shared accountability for communicating and responding when students experience emotional distress.

b. Whole-of-university suicide postvention plan created, launched, and implemented.

c. Establish and sustain peer support communities and their capacity for mental health prevention, preparedness, response and recovery across colleges and residential facilities.

d. Student Council, Groups, and Clubs induction includes approaches for mental health prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Measures of success:

Student voice, participation, and collaboration in wellbeing focussed activity and academic participation increases.

Demonstrated through:

−   Plans developed and implemented

−   Self-reflection reporting tool and survey responses

−   Reduction in students with mental health related themes who have Learning Success Plan (LSP) transitioning to Learning Management Plans (LMP) in subsequent semesters

−   Reduction in complaints related to university community behaviour

Consultation and measures of success

To ensure the strategy remains student-centred there will be significant consultation phases with students, staff, and stakeholders to both socialise the strategy and deliver co-designed actions. The Mental Health Pillar of the Safer Community Framework will provide a consultative space to sponsor and champion work related to meeting the objectives of the strategy. Creating connections with the Your Voice Student Network will be another avenue for consultation and collaborative action.

The strategy will remain dynamic to guide and document whole-of-university action towards achieving objectives that are responsive to learnings discovered during the strategy cycle. Actions required to both undertake and measure success of activities to best meet the identified objectives of each Strategic Focus Area will be determined in consultation with identified stakeholders. Actions will also be established in alignment with other Operational and Enabling Plans that are existing or in development.

Demonstrating the measures of success will include drawing information from measures such as Net Promoter Score (HE and TAFE students), contact and repeat service data, case study, social engagement analytics, website traffic and search analytics, event attendance, numbers of student groups, student graduation, transition, progression analytics, student and staff surveys, and focus groups.

The initial Strategy development has been informed by:

- Student feedback delivered through CDU and Government surveys, including but not limited to Net Promoter Scores (NPS), COVID Pulse Survey, QILT Student Experience Survey

- CDU counselling service delivery data, case study, and analysis

- Australian University Mental Health Framework and principles (Orygen 2020)

- CDU Strategic Plan and Annual report

- CDU SES Core Plan 2022-2026

- Higher Education Standards Panel Retention Report (2017)

- CDU 2020 Higher education success and attrition statistics https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2020-section-15-attrition-success-and-retention

- Orygen University Mental Health Framework (2020)

- Findings articulated in the EAB Virtual Roundtable Series titled, The Next Decade in Student Mental Health and Wellness https://eab.com/event/saf-2021-roundtable-the-next-decade/?autosuggest-term=decade (Education Advisory Board)

- https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/equity-mental-health-framework/

- Disability Standards For Education 2005 dse-fact-sheet-2-dse_0 - Disability Standards educ.docx

- Welcoming Universities Pilot involvement

- World Health Organisation https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

The 4-Step Implementation Plan for actioning the CDU Mental Health Strategy 2022-2026

4-step implementation plans will be developed for each focus area. These will align and overlay with each other and other relevant plans. The steps are as follows:

1. Plan and scope = This discovery step for identifying stakeholders, needs, strengths and gaps, where the conditions, objectives and evaluation measures are established, project plans and risk mitigation strategies outlined, and resourcing and budget requirements scoped.

2. Learn and design = This is a collaboration space to extend on needs, strengths, and gaps analysis, finalise scope and RACI's, identify the key questions to be answered and commence solution design.

3. Create and Achieve = Solution design in action. This can be an iterative phase involving collaboration, consultation, testing and trialing.

4. Evaluate and Adapt = The opportunity for collaborative learning and reflection. Quick win learnings actions and recommendations for mid- to long-term adaption made to return to the plan and scope step.

The different steps for each Focus area outlined in the Implementation plan status reflect how some activity builds on existing practices and activity, or further progressed.

The 4-step implementation plan underpinning principles:

- Be purpose driven – purpose provides the point around which people, activities and resources are organized. Purpose is decided through ethical decision making.

- Recognise complexity – seeking to both influence and to remain open to reframing problems and boundaries as new understandings emerge.

- Protect self-determination – all stakeholders are designers and experts of their experience.

- Equalise power – leaders are enablers with leadership distributed and decision-making devolved as much as possible.

- Inclusive in collaboration – involvement accounts for the different kinds of knowledge they hold, including lived, professional and specialist expertise.

- Adaptive learning – create space, mindsets, and mechanisms for collaborative problem-solving, feedback, wellbeing, and mutual learning. (Blondkamp, E. (2021))

The Strategy on a page

Focus Areas	Governance, Data, and Impact	Understanding, Access, and Accountability	Belonging, Connection, and Agency
Objectives	Student-centred, collaborative, and coordinated evidence-informed innovation and improvement Data demonstrates impact, and guides strategic investments to support prevention, preparation, response, and recovery interventions.	Best-fit resources at the right time and based on their specific context and circumstances throughout student experience	Attending CDU is a protective factor for student mental health. CDU fosters a culture of inclusion and belonging and values our diversity to promote connectedness and collaborative student-led actions. Actions embrace students' diverse experiences and specifically acknowledge and address vulnerabilities and known risks to mental health.
Activities	SWOT and Gaps Analysis tools Wellbeing and Communications Governance Framework Self-reflection reporting tool and surveys for sustainable strategy development and implementation	No wrong door referral pathways Identify diversity, intersectionality and trajectories of student experience, challenges and successes Counselling Service Review Wellbeing workshops and curricular infusion	Whole-of-university interpersonal skill development to improve community confidence, capacity, and shared accountability for communicating and responding to emotional distress. Whole-of-university suicide postvention plan created, launched, and implemented. Establish and sustain peer support communities and their capacity for mental health prevention, preparedness, response and recovery across colleges and residential facilities. Student Council, Groups, and Clubs induction includes approaches for mental health prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.
Measures of success	Developed frameworks and tools Baseline data collected Reduced mental health related themes associated with LSP and LMPs	Mental health literacy and capacity to access resources, services, and information increases. Implementation Plan for actioning immediate, short-, mid- and long-term Counselling Review recommendations Increased participation in focused interventions NPS for targeted services and activities	Student voice, participation, and collaboration in wellbeing focussed activity and academic participation increases. Plans developed and implemented Self-reflection reporting tool and survey responses Reduction in students with mental health related themes who have LSP transitioning to LMPs in subsequent semesters Reduction in complaints related to university community behaviour

The 4 Step Implementation Plan

Evaluate and Adapt · Plan and Scope · Create and Achieve · Learn and Design

Implementation plan status

Governance, Data and Impact	Plan and Scope	Learn and Design	
Understanding, Access and Accountability	Learn and Design	Create and Achieve	Evaluate and Adapt
Belonging, Connection and Agency	Plan and Scope	Create and Achieve	Evaluate and Adapt

Keep us informed

Share what you have done that relates to the strategy focus areas, objectives, activities, or measures of success

https://forms.office.com/r/aTS2p2ixjM

Mental Health Strategy implementation in action

Who can you contact if you are experiencing emotional distress or crisis

- **Life threatening emergency 000**

- **CDU Wellbeing Support Line (available 24 hours) Ph: 1300 933 393 or SMS: 0488 884 144**

- **Lifeline 13 11 14**

- **Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467**

- **Beyond Blue 1300 22 46 36**

- **Headspace 1800 650 890**

- **1800RESPECT 1800 737 732**

- **MensLine Australia 1300 789 978**

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