



**PBC**  
PERTH BIBLE COLLEGE

# 2022-2024 Mental Health Strategy and Implementation Plan

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PBC RECEPTION  
UNIT 1-10



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# Introduction



Here at Perth Bible College (PBC) we recognise the increasing prevalence and complexity of mental health within our communities. For our students, this can mean significant impact on their studies and their capacity to engage in the social aspects of college life, which can then affect their academic performance and course progression. For our staff, this can mean significant impact on their ability to teach and support their peers and students, which in turn, impacts their professional goals and the quality of education provided to our students.

The Old Testament uses the term shalom (peace) to indicate God's commitment to the well-being of the whole person and the community. This theme is taken up in the New Testament where the term is often used as a greeting while closely linked to the theological concept of grace. Grace refers to God's loving intervention to meet people in their brokenness and restore their relationship to himself and to each other. Taking this into consideration, PBC's approach to mental health ensures a whole-of-college response to improving the mental health of our students and staff. It identifies specific risk factors and ways to mitigate or minimise these, supporting students and staff so they can reach their academic, social and professional potential. Our staff are equipped to engage with students from a holistic perspective, grounded in our mission of developing ministry leaders.

Our strategy ensures a commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment, actively promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through a culture of connectedness and community belonging, which reflects God's peace and grace.

Dr Andre van Oudtshoorn  
Principal



# Background

Mental health in Australia was reported as the highest chronic health condition in 2017-18 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Reflecting this, Australian tertiary institutions are reporting increasing mental health concerns amongst their students. A number of reports have identified significantly high levels of stress experienced by students in these institutions, with some suggesting the prevalence of depression and anxiety in university cohorts to be higher than the broader population (Browne, Munro, & Cass, 2017). However, many students seem to be reluctant to seek professional help, despite the free support tertiary education institutions provide. This has largely been linked to negative associations with support services and negative connotations regarding seeking assistance, with individuals who conceal distress being less likely to seek help (Li, Denson, & Dorstyn, 2018).



Consistent with the World Health Organisation, positive mental health is more than a mere lack of a mental health diagnosis, but when an individual is able to recognise their potential, manage everyday stresses, work productively and efficiently, and is able to contribute positively to the community around them (World Health Organisation, 2004). Nor is it binary, but operates on a continuum ranging from mental wellness, to mild stress, to the more severe levels, and finally, to chronic mental illness.

In Australia, the higher education institutions are expected to give great attention to their students' mental health and wellbeing. The Higher Education Standards Framework 2021 (Cth) ensures universities have support services in place specifically for mental health concerns. In addition to this, the Higher Education Standards Panel released a report in June 2018 recommending all higher education institutions have a mental health strategy and implementation plan in order to combat the prevalence of poor mental health in the student cohorts.

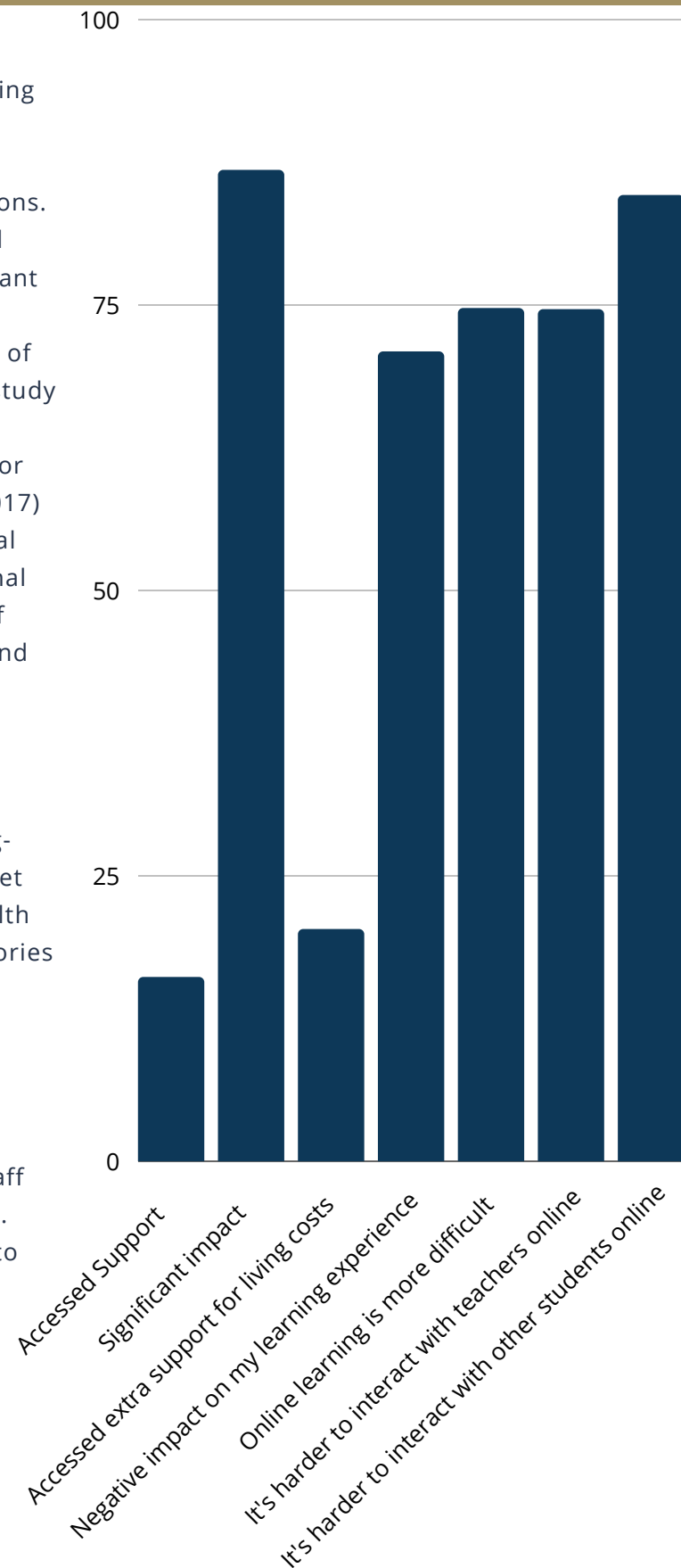


# Identified Risks

Browne et al. (2017) identify various risks relating to the mental health of students in higher education, with the most significant being academic pressure and performance expectations. In addition to these, they also identify financial pressures, such as the accumulation of significant future debt and lack of ability to meet daily expenses, low SES status, and the combination of work and study. Students who both work and study show impacts on their quality of life, social relationships, and lifestyle impacts, such as poor diet and lack of sleep. Finally, Browne et al. (2017) also identify students who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, from rural/regional communities, and international students are of higher risk due to a lack of family, friendship and support networks, and cultural connection.

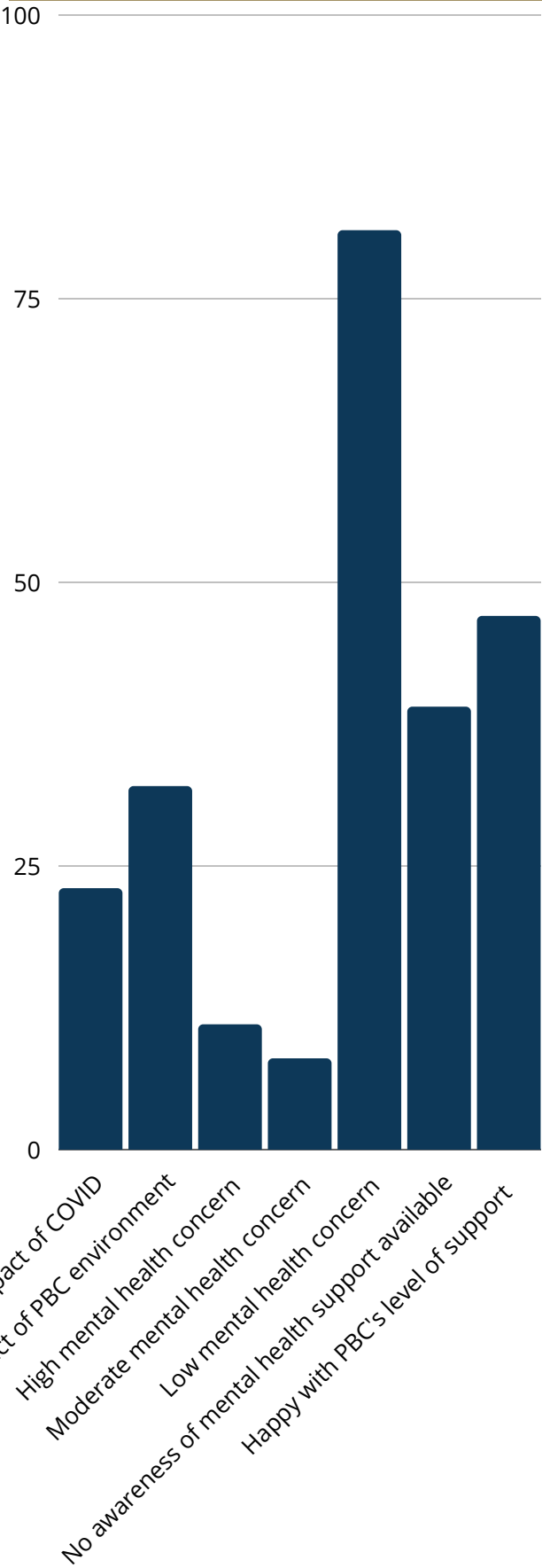
In terms of staff, mental health conditions resulting from factors related to the workplace have been reported as a leading cause for long-term work incapacity and absenteeism (Mazza et al., 2019). The risks impacting staff mental health have been summarised into three broad categories by Jenkins and Harvey (2019): imbalanced job design, occupational uncertainty, and a lack of value and respect in the workplace.

In addition to this, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the stressors for students' and staff mental health, as seen by the graph on the left. Despite this, it seems people are still hesitant to access support.





# What our people say



In response to these risks and to ensure that PBC implements strategies that are informed by our student cohorts, as well as our staff members, we developed a mental health survey to hear what our people have to say regarding our current mental health practices. Some key results of this can be seen in the graph to the left.

From the surveys, the following areas were identified as integral to our staff and students:

- Community
- Relationships
- Academics

In terms of academics, the workloads in particular were mentioned as a major contributor to negative mental health.

Additionally, there seems to be a definitive lack of awareness of the mental health services we currently offer. However, 77% of people who responded suggested the current level of support offered at PBC is to a high standard. Interestingly, the average impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health has been lower than the average impact of the PBC environment.

Overall, staff and students at PBC report a low level of mental health concern. However, a significant number still suggest increased levels of mental health concerns as a result of studying or working at the College.

# Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of PBC's Mental Health Strategy are captured by 4 main areas

## Promotion

The promotion area focuses on combatting continued stigma surrounding mental health concerns, whilst promoting positive mental health in our students and staff.



## Prevention

The prevention area focuses on fostering positive mental health. PBC aims to act in a proactive manner regarding mental health, rather than merely reactive, seeking to foster an environment and culture which helps safeguard against mental illness.



## Support

Though first-and-foremost preventative, PBC's strategy also aims to ensure students and staff experiencing mental health concerns have the relevant support available.



## Protect

The protect area aims to ensure PBC has the institutional processes and policies in place to safeguard students and staff struggling with mental illness.



# PBC's Mental Health Framework

From the above strategic objectives, PBC has created its own Mental Health Framework, utilising the integrative framework suggested by Beyond Blue (2018).





# Implementation Plan

## Awareness

The Awareness aspect relates to combating the stigma surrounding mental illness and ensuring all staff and students are aware of the signs of poor mental health, how to encourage positive mental health, and the support services available.

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources	KPIs
Send students an information sheet regarding mental health services.	Start of each Semester	Dean of Students	N/A	20% increase in reported awareness of services by students.
Promote positive mental health practices.	Annually	Dean of Students	\$100 per annum	Create a media campaign utilising the College's social media pages and student/staff emails once a year.
Conduct regular surveys to stay up-to-date regarding students' and staff's mental health.	Bi-annually	Dean of Students	N/A	Once per semester, a survey is conducted regarding the mental health of people at the College.
Keep up-to-date regarding best practice preventative strategies regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment.	Annually	Dean of Students	N/A	Provide an annual report reviewing sexual assault and sexual health preventative strategies at PBC compared to other institutions.

# Community

The Community aspect focuses on the creating a culture of safety and inclusiveness. This includes the culture of the workplace for staff, and the culture of the College as a learning institution for students.

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources	KPIs
Ensure relevant policies and procedures are in place to protect both staff and students.	Mar 2022	Principal	N/A	All relevant policies and procedures have been published to the website.
Ensure all relevant policies and procedures are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.	Mar 2022	Principal and Board of Management	N/A	Quality Assurance Framework captures and ensures review of relevant policies and procedures.
Conduct a professional development session for staff centred around mental health.	Annually	Dean of Counselling	\$200 per annum	Conduct 1 mental health professional development workshops per year.
Provide mental health first aid training for staff.	Dec 2022	Dean of Counselling	\$1,000	At least 10 staff are trained in the standard MHFA course.
Provide students and staff with training relating to consent and healthy relationships.	Annually	Dean of Counselling	N/A	Provide 2 training courses, one per semester, each year.

# Belonging

The Belonging aspect builds on the Community aspect, seeking to ensure all members of our community have a sense of belonging and ownership when it comes to life at PBC.

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources	KPIs
Continue to facilitate the school council as a student-led initiative.	Each semester	Dean of Students	N/A	Each semester has a student council managed by the students.
Conduct a minimum of one social event per semester.	Bi-annually	Dean of Students	N/A	60% of students attend the events on average.
Conduct one staff team building event per year.	Annually	Principal	\$700 per annum	80% of staff attend the event.
Provide a communal lunch for staff and students each teaching day.	Weekly	Dean of Students	\$12,000 per annum	A lunch is provided for the staff and students each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the teaching semester.
Provide a range of volunteer positions for students.	Feb 2024	College Administrator	N/A	Have a minimum of 10 volunteers each year.
Continue to facilitate the Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Committee with student representatives.	Monthly	Compliance Officer	N/A	Conduct monthly meetings with a minimum of 2 student representatives on the committee.



# Healthy Relationships

The Healthy Relationships aspect seeks to assist students and staff to build healthy peer-to-peer relationships that provide a source of support and encouragement. Though formal services are important, we believe these informal support mechanisms are integral to the development of positive mental health.

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources	KPIs
Conduct weekly devotionals or personal development sessions each semester for students.	Each Semester	Dean of Studies	N/A	Develop a devotion schedule for staff to provide small talks to students once a week
Conduct weekly staff catch-ups to increase support and collaboration.	Weekly	Principal	N/A	Staff meet each week to share current projects and collaborate.

# Resilience

The Resilience aspect seeks to assist students and staff develop their emotional and mental resilience, ensuring members of our community have strategies and techniques to handle the daily stressors of life, particularly when faced with tertiary studies.

Action	Timeline	Responsibility	Resources	KPIs
Provide ongoing pastoral care services and advocacy for students	Mar 2022	Dean of Students	N/A	Students identified as at-risk are referred to the Dean of Students for support and further referral.
Research possible avenues for an Employee Assistance Program.	Sep 2022	Dean of Counselling	N/A	Prepare 5 quotes to take to the Board of Management for consideration.
Provide students with 2 "grace letters" for full-time students, and 1 for part-time students.	Feb 2022	Academic Dean	N/A	There is a maximum of 70% of students using the "grace letters".

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