



Department
of Education

Mental Health in Primary Schools in action: Strengthening Mental Health & Wellbeing Support for Australian Primary School Students

Thriving Children, Thriving Communities Webinar

Monday 14 September 2026

Acknowledgement of Country



Victorian government focus on mental health

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System delivered its final report in 2021, making 65 recommendations, which the government fully accepted.

For schools, the Royal Commission (particularly **Recommendation 17**):

- recognised the important and positive role schools have in promoting and supporting student mental health and wellbeing
- highlighted that health efforts also benefit students' families and the community
- identified that teachers are well placed to identify student mental health challenges and support students when they need it.

In direct response, the Victorian Government:

- invested \$200 million over 4 years and \$87 million ongoing for the Schools Mental Health Fund and evidence-based Menu
- invested a further \$200 million over 4 years and \$93 million ongoing to expand the successful Mental Health in Primary Schools initiative to every government and low-fee non-government primary school in Victoria
- continued funding for a Mental Health Practitioner in every government secondary and specialist school.

Student mental health and wellbeing across DE

FISO 2.0	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes ('FISO 2.0')			Wellbeing at the core of the narrative and accountability framework
	- FISO 2.0 is the guiding framework for schools, which sets priorities across the system. - FISO 2.0 was updated in 2021 to place wellbeing alongside learning as a core student outcome of schooling in its own right. - FISO 2.0 sets the structure of schools' Annual Implementation Plans. In those plans schools must have a student wellbeing goal.			
DIRECT SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS	Mental Health Practitioners Initiative (Government schools only)			Over \$600m new investment in school mental health and wellbeing capacity since 2018
	- The Mental Health Practitioners initiative funds all government secondary schools and special schools with secondary students to employ a qualified Mental Health Practitioner (MHP). MHPs are qualified occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, nurses with mental health specialisations and counsellors of a prescribed class. - MHPs enhance mental health promotion and prevention activities in the school, build the mental health capacity of teaching and school leadership and provide early intervention and support for students with mild to moderate mental health needs.			
FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS	Mental Health in Primary Schools (Government and eligible non-government schools)			
	- The Mental Health in Primary Schools initiative funds every government and low-fee non-government primary school, in Victoria to hire a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader to take a whole-school approach to student mental health and wellbeing, supported by training and learning communities. - Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders build the capability of school staff to identify and support students with mental health concerns and strengthen care pathways for students requiring further assessment and support			
FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS	Schools Mental Health Fund & Menu (Fund available to Government schools only, Menu available to all schools)			
	- All Victorian government schools receive the Fund. - Government and non-government schools can use the Menu to select evidence-based programs, training, staff and services that best meets the mental health and wellbeing needs of their students. High Impact Wellbeing Strategies are 7 practical, evidence-based strategies that have demonstrated a significant positive effect on student wellbeing. Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit provides teachers and schools with advice and resources to support student mental health and wellbeing.			
EXISTING WELLBEING REFORMS	Providing essentials - School Breakfast Clubs in 1,200 schools - Glasses for Kids program - Free Period Products - Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund	Welcoming and inclusive environments - Respectful Relationships - Safe Schools LGBTQIA+ inclusion - Marrung Strategy for Aboriginal inclusion - Disability Inclusion reforms	Supporting vulnerable students - LOOKOUT program for students in Out of Home Care - Navigator program for chronically absent secondary students	Existing government school reforms that target equity, equality and engagement
SCHOOL SYSTEM FOUNDATIONS	Curriculum delivery - Health & PE area; Personal & Social Capability - Respectful Relationships teaching materials, training and whole school approach, RR workforce support		Department's health, wellbeing and inclusion workforce - Student Support Service psychologists, social workers and speech pathologists - Primary and secondary school nurses	

Overview of MHiPS

- MHiPS provides primary schools funding for a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader (MHWL) – a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher – to promote a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- MHiPS builds on a successful pilot (2020-2022) with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education, and then was expanded statewide in Victoria from 2023 to 2026.
- The MHWL works across the school to implement a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. This includes:
 - Building the capacity of school staff
 - Supporting the school to create clear referral pathways
 - Coordinating targeted mental health support for students
 - Implementing a whole-school approach to wellbeing and learning initiatives.

The MHWL role is not a clinical or allied health role.

MHWLs use their intimate knowledge of the in-classroom experiences of teachers to embed curriculum content and teaching practices relating to mental health and wellbeing.



Role of the Department of Education in supporting MHiPS implementation across Victoria

Leading statewide implementation

- Overall policy and program management
- Resource development
- Communications and policy advice to stakeholders and schools
- Funding model review and allocation of funding to schools
- Budgeting and reporting
- Governance, including stakeholder meetings and reporting through DE and broader government structures

Stakeholder and contract management, and provision of funding to:

- MCRI and UoM for the evaluation, development and delivery of training
- Non-government partners VCEA and ISV providing funding, implementation support and professional learning to non- government schools
- Regional mental health teams providing implementation support and professional learning to government schools

Incorporation of evaluation findings into policy to support continuous improvement.

Review and oversight of program communications and training support for schools from training delivery partners.

Supporting integration and alignment of MHiPS with other department student mental health and wellbeing programs and supports, as well as broader reforms across government, such as through the mental health portfolio.

System level impact

School Outcomes



Improved knowledge of and access to external services



Integration of mental health and wellbeing into school curriculum



Increased prioritisation of student mental health and wellbeing

Student Outcomes



Increased help seeking



Improved emotional awareness and mental health literacy



Reduced student incidents, escalations and dysregulation

Teacher Outcomes



Increased mental health literacy



Greater capability and confidence to address student mental health



Reduced stigma around student mental health

Family impacts



Increased mental health literacy and help-seeking



Greater recognition of schools' role in promoting positive social and emotional development



Increased willingness to engage with schools on student mental health reported by staff

Future direction

Fully acquitted Recommendation 17 of the Royal Commission

Sharing the impact of MHiPS, communicating to schools how MHiPS can improve education and wellbeing outcomes

Strengthening guidance for MHWLs for engaging with First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities

Embedding MHiPS in schools. Aligning with FISO 2.0, VTLM 2.0 and other student mental health and wellbeing programs and support

For more information about MHiPS:

- [Mental Health in Primary Schools](#)
- [Policy and Advisory Library \(PAL\)](#) – *Search: mental health in primary schools*
- [MCRI - Mental Health in Primary Schools website](#)
- Email: mentalhealth@education.vic.gov.au