



Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Feedback May 2025

Background

During May 2025 the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Overview was released to the ANU community, asking for feedback via an anonymous web-based form. During the five-week feedback period, we received 42 written responses from staff, 3 from people who were both staff and students and 4 from students. We also received a detailed, written response from a staff team.

We are grateful for the honesty, candour and respect given to us in the feedback, and the trust and desire to help. We appreciate the concerns, weaknesses and problems identified. We also appreciate your encouragement.

Below we have summarised what we heard against the four questions asked [What did you like? Have we missed something? What should we prioritise right now? What else would you like to see?] and created a table where we group key concerns and explain how we will respond. We also publish the feedback in full and present it to ANU leadership.

What do you like about the strategy?

We heard strong support for the strategy's values-driven and inclusive approach, particularly its emphasis on kindness, psychological safety, cultural safety, and systemic change.

Respondents appreciated the clear structure, practical steps (such as the "Do now/Start now" model), focus on prevention, and the recognition of diverse experiences including a meaningful focus on First Nations perspectives.

The strategy's honest tone, broad consultation, and commitment to long-term, community-wide wellbeing were also commended.

While most responses were positive, some expressed concern about the strategy's broadness and complexity, felt it was not anchored enough in feasible actions, noting that successful implementation and leadership accountability will be key to achieving real impact. The strategy was developed just prior to the financial crisis and change process, and a majority encouraged us to connect the Strategy to the University's current state as a matter of urgency.

Overall, the feedback affirmed the ambition of the Strategy, and the need for it, especially as the University undergoes significant change. Staff and students acknowledged how hard the vision will be to achieve, and they put us on notice to do the work and get on with it.

Summary of concerns and response

Concern	Response
Current institutional readiness and capability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deteriorating psychological safety, top-down decision-making, and the unresolved impacts of the recent restructure. - Address culture of lack of transparency – what is not said or made known can be as harmful to wellbeing as what is said or known. - Cultural change among leadership and in decision making for greater empathy, accountability, and psychological safety. 	<p>Alignment with Nixon review will help address this and the Strategy lead is now a member of the Nixon review Steering Committee.</p> <p>We will investigate options to provide training on psychological safety for leaders and consult with the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief People Officer (CPO).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural readiness for initiatives like 360-degree feedback 	<p>Thank you – agree. Need a staged approach for some actions to build cultural readiness e.g., 360 feedback. We will ask People and Culture to provide us with a realistic timeframe, next best step and costings.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate support for physical disabilities, lack of clear guidance for Mental Health First Aiders, and misuse of student mental health information due to insufficient staff training. - More training on how to recognise mental health challenges, especially for managers. 	<p>We will send this feedback to the CPO and explore costing and options for integrating into the implementation plan.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with ANU communications to personify empathy, kindness, psychological and cultural safety in messaging. - Support and inform ANU policies and processes to embed more empathy, kindness, psychological and cultural safety. - Embed empathy and courage consistently across all university policies and systems, not just the Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy. 	<p>We will contact the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Shannon Kenna to develop ways we can implement.</p> <p>We have started work with the University Governance Office to review policy governance and language to be "simpler, clearer, easy, kinder and more connecting, to reduce time burdens". Consultative policy development, ensuring that policy owners "listen more, learn more" will also give our community a stronger sense of connection and ownership over the policy library.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability mechanisms for all day-to-day actions at ANU and for this strategy <p>real accountability, starting with ANU Council</p>	<p>The feedback was presented to the Audit and Finances Committee (a Council subcommittee).</p> <p>Alignment with the Nixon Review on the KPIs and accountability will help address this.</p>
Supporting current organizational change	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A pervasive 'us' versus 'them' rather than a 'with' mentality. - An approach to ongoing organisational changes in a way that rebuilds trust and supports long-term mental health outcomes. - Take action/ensure ANU takes immediate, visible steps to rebuild trust and demonstrate genuine care for staff and student wellbeing (including but not limited to Strategy actions). - Current uncertainty eroding mental health and undermines the Strategy. 	<p>We have sent all feedback to the Provost and COO (as leads of the change process) to consider how the Strategy might support them and be integrated into the change process.</p> <p>The feedback was presented to the Audit and Finances Committee (a Council subcommittee). They have asked us to do a detailed costing of the key initiatives and present back to them.</p> <p>The ANU Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is closely aligned with the Nixon Review and is helping the University navigate its current organisation changes. Both are guided by similar principles that support the new ANU operating model to ensure</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Strategy to serve as a foundation for psychosocial risk assessment, particularly during the current period of change, and to inform updates to key frameworks like change management, WHS, and performance review processes. 	<p>the university is better equipped to meet the needs of its community. They share a lot of common ground in how they propose to get there including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger focus on internal accountability • Being more transparent • Listening to and involving staff more deeply • Making systems simpler and easier to use • Providing more training to help build skills and confidence <p>The opportunity for staff and students to join the Working Groups responding to the Nixon Review Recommendations is an opportunity for all to help rebuild trust and have a say on how we as a community can make impactful changes as a collective</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy must engage with current distress, or it risks 'gaslighting' staff - Actions to address the surge in distress and associated confusion and uncertainty regarding the future - Lack of connection between organizational change process and the Strategy - Engagement with the organizational change process to reduce the current impacts on staff and student mental health from psychosocial harms (uncertainty, workloads, role ambiguity, lack of support and job losses). - Training in change management for all supervisors. 	<p>We have discussed feedback with the Provost and COO (as leads of the change process) to consider how the Strategy might support them and be integrated into the change process. They are currently considering how they might do so (in progress).</p> <p>The feedback was presented to the Audit and Finances Committee (a Council subcommittee).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reset our systems to be easier, simpler, can services that are reshaped by Renew ANU be kinder, responsive, human centric. 	<p>Working closely with the COO as a co-sponsor will help us achieve this and to ensure that the ANU Service Performance Framework is used to guide service redesign.</p>
Feasible, accountable, implementation and monitoring plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy lacks clear, actionable steps and ownership - Lack of enforceable accountability mechanisms for the Strategy, could become a box ticking activity not cultural change - Lack of governance and clear ownership of actions - Specify ownership and accountability for actions to implement. - Clear, detailed, well-resourced and backed implementation plan with immediate, short- and long-term actions. - Accountability mechanisms for the Strategy - The strategy needs an actionable implementation plan with KPIs, budgets, timelines, and named responsibilities. 	<p>The COO and the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic (DVCA) are now co-sponsors as the actions largely sit within their portfolios. This feedback will be part of the discussion and joint efforts as we now develop the implementation plan.</p> <p>We aim to have a plan that outlines actions, responsibilities and dedicate resources over the immediate, short (18 months to 2 year) and long (5 year) term by October 2025.</p> <p>The KPIs listed in the Nixon review are potential monitoring and evaluation metrics.</p> <p>We have been tasked by AFRC committee to develop a costing plan for the Strategy and report back to develop an agreed budget. We will be working with the Finance team and identified leads to do so.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication must be clear, accessible, and ongoing demonstrating how feedback is influencing decisions. 	<p>We completely agree, communication and regular updates have been central to the work of the MHWS Working Group including a SharePoint site.</p> <p>We are now working on the Main website with Marketing and Communications so that we can make it a place for ongoing feedback and review.</p>

	<p>The Overview Report, released in May, provided valuable insights and suggestions, many of which are now being incorporated. This document reflects our continued commitment to acting on that input.</p> <p>The Inclusive and Respectful Communities Team (IARC) will publish annual reports outlining the University's progress in meeting its commitments under the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation needs to be co-developed with Nixon report - Confusion over how the strategy connects with existing frameworks and strategies like IDEA. 	<p>Underway.</p> <p>Work will take place in late 2025 on the streamlining of all equity, diversity and inclusion strategies. The work will be lead by the Inclusive and Respectful Communities (IARC) team and People and Culture.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No discussion on the significant resources needed to implement actions under Connecting Communities or Partnerships in Place, especially mental health services. - ANU to commit to practical, preventative, and sustained change that genuinely supports mental health and wellbeing beyond the immediate crisis. 	<p>We aim to have a plan that outlines actions, responsibilities and dedicate resources over the immediate, short (18 months to 2 year) and long (5 year) term by October 2025.</p> <p>We have been tasked by the AFR Committee (a Council subcommittee) to develop a base, medium and gold standard costing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rungs on the board get some immediate results to build momentum -Tangible, systems-level improvements, such as a centralised database for accessible exam spaces, more staff advisers, early intervention supports, and mental health training at various levels. 	<p>Several actions outlined in the Strategy have already been implemented within existing budgets, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAP Workplace Barometer (2024): The University participated in this survey to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities in advancing reconciliation and First Nations leadership. Results were published in the OnCampus newsletter on 7 May. • Education Access Plan Review: A review of the Education Access Plan process was conducted in consultation with students, academics, and professional staff. The revised process is awaiting final approval. • Student Advisory Forum Reinstatement: To enhance communication with the student body on activities and policies affecting them, the University has re-established this informal forum for discussions and consultations between the Academic Portfolio, ANUSA, and student representatives from all Colleges. • Canvas Learning Platform (S2 2025): The University launched Canvas, a new learning platform offering improved course consistency, integrated tools, easier communication, and multi-device access. • 'ANUHub' Launch (S2 2025): The University introduced ANUHub, the new interactive Student Information System (previously ISIS). • Extenuating Circumstances Application Improvements: Processes have been streamlined as part of broader systems enhancement. • New ANU Student Hub (Opening mid-August 2025): This expanded, centrally located facility will house all Student Central services, along with the Allianz OSHC representative and the ANU Service Desk, in a more accessible space.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Life and Equity Programs: Ongoing initiatives provide opportunities for student connection, food security support, and safe, healing spaces. • Staff Health and Wellbeing Website: The Safety and Wellbeing Team developed an online hub offering resources, programs, and events to support staff in maintaining a healthy work–life balance. • Uni Virtual Clinic (UVC): An online platform providing students with accessible mental health resources, tools, and video modules <p>These are all important and valuable suggestions – several are listed in the current action plan. We will feedback to People and Culture and DVCA the actions not yet in the strategy for their consideration.</p>
Content and focus	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More partnerships with ACT services not feasible or effective. - Insufficient resourcing for counselling and flexible work arrangements - Student wellbeing remains an on-going problem - Create Safe Havens and Recovery Colleges - Bring back the ANU Medical clinic - More student counselling and financial supports - More staff mental health support on campus (not outsourced). - More attention to international students' mental health and experiences. 	<p>We have changed the strategy on partnerships in place significantly because of the feedback.</p> <p>We became aware that efforts to create partnerships and bring more services onto campus have been underway and although a good idea were not yielding good results. Instead, we are exploring ways to connect to existing and nearby services via supported peer led approaches. We will work with the Counselling team and ANUSA to codesign</p> <p>We have also raised the need for clarification with ANU DVCA on delineating and communicating to campus what ANU is able to provide and how it will help staff and student access services it does not provide.</p> <p>Ongoing discussions are focused on clarifying the role of the ANU in providing mental health care to staff and students, identifying responsibilities that fall under ACT services, and exploring additional ways to deliver more accessible and affordable support.</p> <p>We also recognise the need for greater support and resources for our international student cohort. The IARC team is actively considering how best to address this within the broader context of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategies including through the Student Safety and Wellbeing Committee and the initiatives outlined in this strategy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact of financial pressures and their impacts on mental health such as increased parking costs, cost of living, excessive workloads, job insecurity and precarity from grant-funded roles especially for ECRs and MCRs. - Practical actions to address cost of living pressures, such as addressing parking and restoring on-campus health and EAP services. This also signals leadership's commitment to people and valuing of them. 	<p>We acknowledge and throughout our consultations have received feedback regarding the impact of the current cost of living and other financial pressures on staff and students, some of the actions outlined in the Strategy are designed to help alleviate these burdens. We are currently costing them.</p> <p>The IARC has completed a review of the EAP process with the report in the final stages of approval.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structural issues like workload, ageism, and systemic disadvantages affecting women, carers, and early-career staff. - Importance of recognising carers, addressing neurodiversity, and ensuring that escalation pathways for psychological harm are safe, effective, and result in accountability. 	<p>Accountability has been a consistent theme in the feedback we have received throughout the consultation period and in our discussions with the community. That is why it is the first theme for action in this strategy, with a key goal being the development of a whole-of-campus accountability framework, including metrics for both staff and students.</p> <p>We also recognise that structural issues currently disadvantage some members of our community more than others. We think several of our actions will help improve pathways for raising concerns.</p> <p>We will feedback to People and Culture the feedback on training for neurodiversity.</p>
- Ways to connect staff as well as student communities post Covid	Action area 3 Connecting community strategy aims to achieve this
- Address the health harms of job insecurity now and in the future.	<p>This is a valuable suggestion. It is particularly relevant given the current organisational changes within the university.</p> <p>We think that embedding human centric and kind approaches into change and more broadly into our culture may help. This is a sector wide problem as well as a university problem. Would love to hear more ideas on how to create both awareness and action on this issue and welcome the community to contact us.</p>
Communication and accessibility	
- Relies too heavily on vague language and ineffective visuals – needs to be more accessible	<p>Thank you for this feedback, we acknowledge that some of the language used may have come across as aspirational and that the visuals may not have been as clear as intended. Our goal is to make the strategy as accessible, inclusive and actionable as possible. In response we are reviewing the document incorporating some of this feedback. We will also work with the relevant areas in the university to ensure that the document and the visuals are fully accessible before the final publish.</p>
- Concrete examples of what kindness, psychological and cultural safety look like	<p>Harvard Business review has a great article describing how kindness is essential for a health organization https://hbr.org/2025/07/why-kindness-isnt-a-nice-to-have</p> <p>They give some helpful, straightforward examples of kindness as integral to organizational success and culture, from how people are addressed (by name, with effort to pronounce), actively listening in meetings and conversations, giving full attention (phones are put away), Expressing gratitude and thanking others for their contributions, giving feedback, including difficult feedback in ways that are prompt, open, respectful, consider the other person and care for their dignity, wellbeing and success. A final example is when unkind behaviour is occurring, it is called out and people are held accountable for it.</p> <p>This website also provides useful examples https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/</p>

	<p>VicHealth has published guidelines which provide concrete examples of what needs to be in place for organizations to move towards cultural safety. At the organizational level actions focusses on monitoring, accountability and training to end racism and discrimination, clear commitments and targets on First Nation employment and students, designing workplaces and learning spaces to be culturally welcomes via art-work and messaging. At its most basic it is acknowledging our history and the impact of colonization and making the effort to ensure decisions and ways of working and relating are aware of and reduce power differences, enable agency and self-determination.</p> <p>https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework-guidelines</p> <p>Psychological safely in a meeting looks like: People at all levels being able to say they have made a mistake, don't know something or have doubts, and it is not punished but is learnt from. The Chair/leader saying they don't know the answer or solution and asking what others think. People asking if they have missed something or even asking if anyone disagrees with them or has a different view, drawing out other viewpoints as valid or welcomed. A short video that illustrates the connection between wellbeing, performance and psychological safely can be viewed here.</p>
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