

Service Delivery Domains

There are four commonly recognised domains of service delivery that provide a staged response to addressing the needs of students within the school environment: primary prevention, early intervention, interventions requiring complex responses and restoring wellbeing (postvention).

These levels of service delivery span the continuum of care provision and to some extent overlap, from the support needed by all children and young people, to the additional support needed in crisis situations. For example, strategies to improve student attendance may function as both an early intervention initiative, to address a student's recent, unexplained absence from school, and as an initiative to address one of the multiple risk factors presented by a student requiring a complex response. Primary Welfare Officers should work in partnership with school professionals, community based services and early childhood providers to ensure holistic and seamless service provision across and through these domains as required.

The escalation of students through these service domains should follow a staged response that is informed by a comprehensive assessment of need conducted by all available and relevant professionals, such as teachers, leadership staff, student support services, Primary Welfare Officers and community based services.

Primary Prevention and Health Promotion

Build belonging and promote wellbeing

Primary prevention strategies are the most effective way to promote health and wellbeing in children, and constitute the vast majority of programs delivered by schools. Primary prevention strategies build belonging and promote wellbeing in children and young people by enhancing the emotional and social health of all students. This is achieved through raising awareness about what makes students resilient, developing strategies to reduce vulnerabilities and increasing coping skills.

A strength of primary prevention is an inclusive approach that engages with children and young people and acknowledges their rights and responsibilities in influencing their social, emotional and educational environment.

Primary Welfare Officers work collaboratively with other health and wellbeing services to support whole school

and group activities that improve students' capacity and skills to make good choices, resulting in strong health and wellbeing outcomes.

Strategies build belonging and promote wellbeing can include:

- building mutual respect and safety at school through clear student engagement policies and procedures
- implementing a comprehensive curriculum to engage all students
- differentiating curriculum and programs to accommodate different approaches based on gender, social, cultural and linguistic considerations
- enhancing student attendance, through whole school policies, approaches, programs, responses and follow up care
- enhancing student safety, including individual safety such as being sun smart, relationship safety such as anti-bullying promotion, and collective safety within the school grounds, at the start and end of the day, during journeys to school such as stranger danger and safe road crossing skills
- practicing inclusive teaching and learning that respect and accommodate students from all backgrounds and abilities, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexuality, culture, language or disability
- encouraging supportive relationships between students and teachers, amongst the student cohort, and with community members and groups, by promoting respectful behaviour and adopting a collaborative approach to learning, accountability and responsibility
- involving parents/carers and communities to be a part of the school community through meaningful consultation and information dissemination
- easing transitions through bridging programs, orientation and peer mentoring such as the 'big friends, little friends' initiative.

Early intervention

Strengthen coping skills and reduce risk factors

Despite a strong focus on preventative activities, some students face barriers to learning or have additional needs that are not adequately addressed through the general curriculum and primary prevention approach. Research shows that early identification and intervention to address risk, vulnerability or need, results in the best outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The aim of early intervention strategies is to protect the wellbeing of students and facilitate their learning by strengthening coping skills and reducing risk for students

who have been identified as possessing ongoing social, emotional, and/or physical risks or needs. Early intervention strategies target these students so that the intensity, severity and duration of the risk or need are reduced.

Students who have a number of risk factors operating in their lives are a particular focus of early intervention programs. Their multiple needs mean these individuals are especially vulnerable when service systems are poorly integrated and uncoordinated. It is essential that early intervention service provision is both holistic and integrated, to ensure comprehensive service delivery, smooth transitions, and culturally, linguistically, gender and stage of life appropriate approaches that recognise the importance of both family and community in students' lives.

The success of early intervention strategies lies in early identification of students at risk, comprehensive assessment procedures and the provision of appropriate, targeted services. Ongoing monitoring and management is required to remain responsive to the changing needs of at risk students, and ensure that the programs or services provided are achieving the desired results.

A commitment to service excellence and implementing evidence-based programs assists in achieving better outcomes by constantly improving identification, assessment and management of students at risk, through evaluation and reflective practices.

Early intervention strategies that attempt to address both the cause of the need at school, and any underlying factors as far as possible, will be more successful than those just focussed on school based causation. For example, a school with poor attendance records may need to address both student engagement, and parental engagement with the school, through the adoption of more inclusive policies and procedures that encourage parental participation and collaboration, while setting clear expectations.

Role of Primary Welfare Officers in Early Intervention

Primary Welfare Officers work with the school health and wellbeing team to coordinate integrated support for students and families, aiming to identify risk, vulnerability and need early, before significant problems arise. Provision of support as soon as possible assists to positively shift the student's developmental pathway and maximise outcomes that will impact on their future.

Primary Welfare Officers typically undertake a coordination role within schools, which will generally involve developing whole school strategies that target groups of children based on need, barriers to learning, age, gender, cultural, social and other considerations as appropriate.

Strategies to strengthen coping skills and reduce risk factors can include:

- reviewing existing school policy and procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing health and welfare approach, including any gaps and convergences with student need
- assessing risks and identifying student needs, including consideration of underlying factors that can be appropriately addressed by the school
- researching, developing and implementing evidence-based programs to improve student, parent/carer and teacher knowledge, skills and engagement
- provision of support and information at school, which is delivered in multiple languages if required, and is sourced from a wide variety of sources such as other government departments and community-based services, as appropriate
- fostering stronger partnerships with community-based services, local government services and other government agencies to promote holistic, integrated service provision and clear referral pathways

It is essential that early intervention programs are monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness, measure outcomes, ensure fidelity of implementation of evidence-based interventions and to inform improved future approaches.

Interventions Requiring Complex Responses

Provide access to support information and treatment

Interventions requiring complex responses aim to provide effective treatment and support to students in crisis, many of whom are experiencing multiple barriers to learning that are affecting their health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. Concerted efforts by schools, in partnership with their communities, are needed to intervene when initial action to prevent or divert the development of these serious difficulties is not successful.

Risk factors that can contribute to students being in crisis can include mental health issues, family difficulties and breakdown including placement in out-of-home care, abuse and neglect, sexual identity, drug and alcohol misuse, and eating disorders. These factors can result in students disengaging from school, significant behavioural issues including truancy, bullying, and violence, the likelihood of teenage pregnancy, and poor health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. Collaborative intervention to improve such behaviour is a crucial area of work for schools, Primary Welfare Officers and community services.

Responding effectively to students in crisis requires a focus on:

- documented procedures for identifying students at risk so that no students 'fall through the gap', promoting comprehensive assessment of barriers to learning,

recording the primary prevention and early intervention activities to date and resulting outcomes, and reviewing the services available from community agencies

- clear referral procedures
- easy access to counselling and treatment
- strong partnerships with students and families, relevant community groups and external service providers to ensure a tailored, culturally appropriate, holistic intervention is developed
- strong support frameworks for the intervention, that may include a case management plan, student support group, and individual student learning plan, which are agreed to by the student, parents and relevant school professionals and external providers
- continuity of care, including a stable advocate or mentor
- continual monitoring of student outcomes and the appropriateness of the intervention, including celebrating the successes
- targeted professional development for teachers and Primary Welfare Officers.

Role of Primary Welfare Officers in Interventions Requiring Complex Responses

For those students requiring complex responses, Primary Welfare Officers work within an integrated approach to coordinate the effective support, intervention and monitoring that is required, which may include participation on a Student Support Group and in developing an Individual Education Plan. An important part of this response is to make sure that there are strong and well-understood links to specialists and relevant community services.

Primary Welfare Officers can assist in coordinating complex interventions for groups of students, particularly if the school has a high proportion of students presenting similar and multiple barriers to learning, behavioural issues, and/or have below average indicators for attendance, academic attainment and wellbeing. These below average indicators may be the result of student cohort or population wide factors that are affecting school engagement and wellbeing, such as low socio-economic/disadvantaged background, a large proportion of students are supported by the Education Maintenance Allowance or come from a refugee background.

Restoring wellbeing (postvention)

Manage trauma and limit impact

Restoring wellbeing involves providing appropriate support to students, their families and the school community who are affected by an emergency situation, natural disaster or traumatic incident such as suicide, accident or illness.

Preparedness, appropriate response and recovery activities following a potentially traumatic event can mitigate the impact of trauma related symptoms and

facilitate the ongoing development of resilience, including appropriate coping skills. The impact of a traumatic event may be felt to varying degrees by different students, their families or other members of the school community, depending on their exposure to or connectedness with the incident, existing support networks and level of resilience or coping skills.

Programs and responses designed to restore wellbeing after a critical incident should closely monitor and manage the emotional and psychological effects on the school community.

Role of Primary Welfare Officers in Restoring Wellbeing

In situations such as in an emergency, natural disasters or potentially traumatic incidents, Primary Welfare Officers may coordinate support to restore the wellbeing of students affected in consultation with other health and wellbeing staff, and regional and central offices, if required. Examples may include coordinating the participation of secondary school nurses, student support services and school chaplains to ensure support is targeted, appropriate and responsive to the needs of individuals and the wider school communities.

Primary Welfare Officers may also assist schools to implement strategies that focus on re-connecting students who are disengaged from the school system.

Strategies to manage trauma and limit the impact can include:

- increasing the awareness of trauma impact amongst school staff and students through the coordinated provision of appropriate curriculum, information sources and contact
- assisting with the planning for emergency responses, in collaboration with the principal, health and wellbeing team and teachers
- providing counselling support, depending on the qualifications of the Primary Welfare Officer
- coordinating the development and implementation of whole school critical incident and emergency response strategies, policies and programs, that are tailored to the needs of the school community
- providing a central point of contact during a crisis and recovery, in addition to school leadership staff
- monitoring recovery and evaluating emergency response plans and strategies.

Where can I obtain further information?

General information about the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/welfareofficers.aspx>.