

Partnerships are collaborative relationships with a clear and shared sense of purpose involving key stakeholders focused on an agreed outcome. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect, and are mutually beneficial relationships that can achieve outcomes beyond those each organisation can achieve in isolation.

In the context of education, skills and early childhood development, an effective partnership provides opportunities to achieve improved learning and development for all Victorians and can enhance engagement and wellbeing.

The provision of support for children and young people is a shared responsibility that requires input from many different stakeholders, including schools, student support and wellbeing staff, families, other Departmental programs and external services and organisations.

With so many stakeholders, it is essential that strong relationships and partnerships exist that support:

- high quality, coordinated, consistent and appropriate service provision
- information flow between services, schools and families
- successful transitions and pathways (e.g. between early childhood and school)
- effective referral pathways
- easy access to required services.

Strong relationships are formed through:

- regular communication and case management updates
- provision of support and advice as required, or requested
- mutual respect and understanding of the roles of all team members and service providers
- joint leadership for the partnership, including agenda setting and evaluation
- celebration of successes and achievements, and a commitment to review and refine practice.

Service relationships may be either:

- informal – based on consultative arrangements, personal and professional networks, organisational commitment and shared goals; or
- formal – based on a written agreement, such as a service protocol or memorandum of understanding.

Integrated Team Approach

Primary Welfare Officers are active members of a school's student wellbeing team, working in collaboration with a wide range of school-based and external professionals to develop and implement strategies that are integrated, holistic, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and which are focussed on achieving student outcomes in the context of family and community background.

The programs and interventions planned and delivered by this integrated team aims to support families' capacity to promote and improve young people's health, wellbeing, learning and development.

School-Based Relationships

Health and wellbeing is an essential component if students are to achieve positive outcomes at school, including academic achievement, successful transitions between levels of learning, and positive engagement with the school community as a whole. Student wellbeing is considered to be a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, health, resilience and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at schools.

Primary Welfare Officers are an integral part of a school's health and wellbeing team, providing coordination of programs, development of whole school approaches to promoting health and wellbeing, and facilitating strong partnerships between all stakeholders concerned with the health and wellbeing of students.

Within the school environment, Primary Welfare Officers maintain strong relationships in collaboration with:

- **Parents and students** – to ensure students and families are engaged with the school and understand the importance of health and wellbeing in achieving positive learning outcomes and life skills. Families have a major influence on a child's success in school and life. When schools and families work in partnership, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.
- **Teachers and principals** - to ensure student needs and school priorities are being met through the provision of appropriate whole school health and wellbeing initiatives; the availability of programs, and that positive progress is reported to the school community through available channels such as the school newsletter, printed materials at the front office and student reports; and workforce capacity is

increasing through targeted training and collaboration activities.

- **Health and wellbeing teams** – to ensure integrated, holistic service delivery, through communication with Health and Wellbeing Coordinators, Student Support Services, Student Welfare Officers, Visiting Teachers, School Nurses, Chaplains, Guidance Officers, Koorie Engagement Support Services and School Focused Youth Services.

Early Childhood and Community Partnerships

Primary Welfare Officers take a leading role in assisting schools to form and maintain relationships with other Departmental and government programs, as well as external service providers such as community groups, local governments and private practices.

Strong partnerships with these services can help streamline service delivery during student transitions, such as between services or schools, and raise awareness about the variety of services available to address the additional needs of children and young people throughout their development.

Working with other service providers helps Primary Welfare Officers to expand their knowledge base and expertise, while contributing to positive outcomes for children, young people and their families. Where a child or young person has multiple additional needs, a range of services may need to be involved to provide holistic support both in school and in the community.

These services and programs may include:

- Early Childhood Services – such as Pre-school Field Officers, Early Childhood Intervention Services, Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services, Maternal Child Health Services
- Disability services – such as the Program for Students with Disabilities, Language Support Program, Royal Children's Hospital School Care Program
- Mental Health services – such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), CAMHS and Schools Early Action (CASEA) Program, Headspace (age group 12-25)
- External services – such as specialised professional support across any allied health discipline, including those not available through student support services, or other health and wellbeing services, in both the community service sector and private practice.

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>.