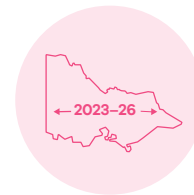


# Mental Health in Primary Schools Evaluation summary

## Statewide evaluation of MHiPS

The Victorian Government has invested \$200 million over four years and \$97 million ongoing to expand the landmark Mental Health in Primary School (MHiPS) initiative to support the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian students.



Following a successful pilot phase from 2020–22, MHiPS is expanding statewide from 2023–26.



The Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) is evaluating MHiPS as it expands statewide.



The evaluation is examining the effectiveness of MHiPS and its impact in schools as the initiative is being implemented.



### The Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader role:

Through MHiPS, schools receive funding to employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader (MHWL) to implement a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. The role is designed to respond to the unique needs of the school.

The MHWL Jigsaw (pictured) highlights the key activities of the MHWL role.

### Successful MHiPS implementation in schools is supported by:

- ✓ Strong school leadership support
- ✓ Participation in MHiPS training and learning communities
- ✓ Ongoing involvement in MHiPS
- ✓ Protected time to perform the MHWL role
- ✓ MHWLs delivering tailored professional learning to school staff
- ✓ MHWLs connecting and sharing ideas

## Evaluation findings from the statewide expansion of MHiPS show:

Sustained implementation is linked to positive student mental health and wellbeing outcomes

**80%**

of staff in established MHiPS schools and

**69.7%**

of staff in new MHiPS schools **observed improvements in student mental health and wellbeing**

Since participating in MHiPS, school staff have observed improvements in student:

- emotional literacy and help seeking
- school connectedness and attendance
- social skills.

Source: 2023 statewide staff survey (n=798 from 84 established MHiPS schools, implementing since 2020-2022. Represents 84% of established MHiPS schools from diverse rurality and school types. n=1,951 from 338 new MHiPS schools, implementing since 2023. Represents 87% of new schools from diverse rurality and school types.); % based on completed responses only.

Improved staff capability to address students' mental health and wellbeing needs

Observed changes after 1 year of MHiPS implementation include:

**87.2%**

of school staff had increased confidence to support student mental health and wellbeing

**87.7%**

of school staff saw a reduction in mental health stigma amongst school staff

**82.5%**

of school staff observed a reduction in stigma amongst families.

Source: 2023 statewide staff survey (n=1,951 from 338 new MHiPS schools, implementing since 2023. Represents 87% of new schools from diverse rurality and school types.); % based on completed responses only.

Strengthened relationships between schools and families

MHiPS is leading to:



increased communication and engagement between schools and communities



stronger connection between families, schools and teachers regarding students with complex needs



improved mental health literacy amongst families with sustained MHiPS implementation in schools.

Source: 2023 longitudinal case studies and 2021-23 longitudinal parent survey (n=3650).

## MHiPS in metropolitan, non-government school

### School profile

**Year levels:** Prep to Year 6

**School size:** 500-550 students

**Year MHWL appointed:** 2022

### Whole school approach

At this metropolitan, non-government school, the MHWL sits in the school leadership team. This allows the MHWL to oversee the planning and implementation of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

To implement this approach the MHWL has:

- introduced a shared language around mental health and wellbeing
- surveyed school staff to track perceptions of student mental health and wellbeing
- developed a school wide bi-lingual newsletter to communicate wellbeing updates with the school community. 60-70% of the school community has a language background other than English
- built upon existing non-government sector referral networks, policies and programs.

### Supporting teacher workload

MHiPS is helping alleviate burnout and teacher workload at the school. When new concepts and approaches such as MHiPS are introduced in schools, short-term increases to teacher workload may occur. However, having the MHWL in a dedicated role to coordinate MHiPS has helped facilitate cultural change without overburdening staff.

“

We're not shying away from the word mental health, we are using it in lessons, we are using it as part of the name for the mental health and wellbeing hub. So it's becoming more normalised, we are trying to take the stigma away.”

– MHWL

## MHiPS in regional, government school

### School profile

**Year levels:** Prep to Year 6

**School size:** 350-400 students

**Year MHWL appointed:** 2022

### Whole school approach

Before MHiPS, there was no coordinated wellbeing team at this school. The MHWL led the effort to coordinate a more structured, whole school approach to student mental health and wellbeing.

At the centre of the whole school approach the MHWL is focused on building teacher capacity and creating systems and processes to support wellbeing across the school by:

- developing a care pathway resource to support school staff and coordinate mental health referrals to internal and external support
- providing professional learning to school staff
- establishing a wellbeing space for students to utilise at recess and lunch
- meeting and communicating with families to share wellbeing information and resources.

### Impact on student wellbeing

Since the implementation of MHiPS, students have demonstrated improved emotional literacy, being able to describe changes in their emotions and use self-regulation strategies. An increase in help seeking behaviour was also reported amongst school staff and students at the school.

“

The language and the skills that are coming through from the MHiPS program, can be integrated into anything that we do. And I think that's the power of having that mental health lens.”

– School Principal

“

The [MHWL] role has given us an awareness and an understanding these are issues that are facing our kids and that it's okay to actually explore them and talk about them ...”

– Teacher