# **Mental Health in Primary Schools**

**Non-government school questions and answers**

## Background to the Mental Health in Primary Schools program

## **What is the Mental Health in Primary Schools program?**

* The Mental Health in Primary Schools program supports schools to employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader, a qualified teacher, to implement a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
* The program is based on a Pilot that commenced in 2020 and ran until 2022, developed in partnership with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute (MCRI) and the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.
* The Victorian Government is providing $200 million over four years and $93.7 million ongoing to expand the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) program to every government and low-fee non-government primary school in Victoria by Term 1, 2026.

## **What does the program aim to do?**

* The program aims to improve student mental health outcomes by:
  + building the capacity and confidence of educators to better identify and support students with mental health concerns
  + implementing effective mental health strategies aligned to social and emotional learning in the curriculum, and whole-school approaches to health, wellbeing, teaching and learning initiatives
  + developing clear referral pathways internally (within school) and externally (to community services) for students identified as requiring further assessment and intervention
  + improving school connections with local health services to better navigate the service sector.

## Program Funding and Roll-out

## **How do schools receive funding for the program?**

* Eligible non-government schools receive funding of 0.4 FTE for a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader.

1. **What funding do the former pilot schools receive?**

* The MHiPS pilot has concluded. Former non-government pilot schools will transition from their pilot funding allocation to the MHiPS statewide expansion funding model by 2026, in line with other schools participating in the program.
* In 2024, non-government schools that participated in the Mental Health in Primary Schools Pilot in 2022 will continue to receive funding comparable to their 2022 FTE allocation.
* From 2025, non-government schools that participated in the Mental Health in Primary Schools Pilot in 2022 will transition from their Pilot funding allocation to the 0.4 FTE funding allocation, in line with all other non-government schools participating in the program.
* In 2025, they will receive 0.4 FTE at the Classroom Teacher 2-4 salary plus 50 per cent of the gap between their Pilot allocation and the 0.4 FTE funding allocation.
* In 2026, all former pilot schools will receive the same rate as all other participating non-government schools at 0.4 FTE.
* School eligibility is reviewed each year. Eligibility is assessed based on a low fee threshold that considers schools’ private income levels and total enrolments.

## **What is the roll-out schedule for the expansion?**

* The roll-out pattern for schools will be based on DET Area boundaries. The pattern will be:
  + South West Region
    - 2023: Barwon, Brimbank Melton
    - 2024: Western Melbourne
    - 2025: Wimmera South West
    - 2026: Central Highlands
  + North West Region
    - 2023: Hume Merri-bek
    - 2024: Mallee
    - 2025: Loddon Campaspe
    - 2026: North East Melbourne
  + North East Region
    - 2023: Goulburn
    - 2024: Ovens Murray
    - 2025: Outer East Melbourne
    - 2026: Inner East Melbourne
  + South East Region
    - 2023: Outer Gippsland
    - 2024: Southern Melbourne
    - 2025: Inner Gippsland
    - 2026: Bayside Peninsula.
* If eligible, all MHiPS Pilot schools will participate in the statewide program from 2023. The pilot has now concluded.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader

## **What is the role of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader?**

* The role of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader is to focus on the promotion and prevention of mental health and wellbeing through implementation of programs, approaches and initiatives based on the needs of the school. This includes:
  + promoting a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing to students, staff and families
  + supporting teachers and school staff to expand their capacity to embed evidence-based mental health strategies, interventions and programs and build mental health literacy to identify and support primary school students with mental health concerns
  + implementing effective mental health strategies aligned to social and emotional learning in the curriculum, and whole-school approaches to health, wellbeing, teaching and learning initiatives
  + embedding evidence-based training and resources across the school to build the capability of staff to better identify and support students
  + collaborating with school staff to inform, influence and provide input into teaching and learning relating to mental health and wellbeing
  + working with school leadership and wellbeing teams to embed whole-school approaches to mental health into school planning and strategic processes
  + coordinating clear referral pathways internally (within school) and externally (to community services) for students identified as requiring further assessment and intervention
  + proactively working with school wellbeing and leadership teams, teachers, parents/carers and other external agencies to coordinate targeted mental health support for primary school students
  + contributing to the school’s existing wellbeing team.

## **What qualifications does a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader need?**

* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders should have suitable teaching qualifications and registrations with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.
* A qualification in student wellbeing or mental health is desirable but not required.

## **Why is the role for teacher-qualified professionals instead of mental health qualified practitioners?**

* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders are typically teachers as their role is designed to ensure mental health prevention and early intervention are embedded in the classroom.
* Using their intimate knowledge of the in-classroom experiences of teachers, Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders complement the school’s existing wellbeing team. In particular, they can assist teachers with input into the development, implementation and evaluation of processes, curriculum content and teaching practices relating to mental health and wellbeing, and embedding it within their teaching pedagogy.
* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders can work with classroom teachers to create a safe, welcoming and inclusive classroom and develop student’s social and emotional skills. They can work with classroom teachers to develop curriculum content on social and emotional learning in the classroom. These skills support students to develop a positive attitude about self, school, and increase academic engagement.
* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders build relationships with regional staff, community services and other health professionals to engage with appropriate mental health and wellbeing support.
* The Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders role is not designed to provide one to one counselling to primary school students. Therefore, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader role is not required to have allied health or similar qualifications.

1. **What training is provided for the role?**

* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders are provided extensive training by the Faculty of Education at University of Melbourne, supported by Murdoch Children’s Research Institute.
* Currently, three training modules are delivered:
  + Module 1: Mental Health Literacy
  + Module 2: Supporting Emerging Needs
  + Module 3: Building School Capacity.
* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders receive support and professional development through a structured and regular Communities of Practice.
* Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders also come together in local Communities of Practice to address common issues and focus on local improvement opportunities.

## **What support will schools receive to implement the program?**

* Supporting school leaders is key to the successful implementation of the expansion of the Mental Health in Primary Schools program.
* Schools will receive guidance and resources to support implementation, including policy advice, draft templates and implementation guidelines.

## **How will Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders be appointed?**

* Catholic schools are required to recruit in line with their regular CECV Diocesan processes. Please liaise with your Diocesan Employment Relations Unit regarding the appointment of staff.
* Independent schools may refer to the relevant recruitment policies pertaining to the school and may liaise with human resources at the organisation.
* Participating schools should aim to begin the recruitment of their Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader before the end of the school year and have their Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader in place by Term 1 of the year they join the program. This will enable them to access a comprehensive induction provided through the University of Melbourne training.

## **What support will schools receive to undertake recruitment of their Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader?**

* Schools will be provided with template position descriptions and example interview questions and answers to support recruitment.
* Schools may wish to draw on existing attraction and retention strategies when recruiting, including:
  + Jointly recruiting with another/other nearby school(s)
  + Allowing flexible working arrangements such as job-share arrangements
  + Appointing at a higher FTE and topping up the difference using other school resources
  + Financial and salary incentives where available to the school.

## Research and Evaluation

## **How is the program evaluated?**

* A key aspect of the program is that it is informing larger scale research to understand how to build the capability of Victorian primary schools to better support student mental health and wellbeing. More specifically, the aim is to define and implement a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader model within primary schools, including the development of a training program for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader role.

## Schools Mental Health Menu

1. **What is the Schools Mental Health Menu?**

* The Department of Education and Training has developed a Schools Mental Health Menu, a list of endorsed evidence-based programs and initiatives across the three tiers of intervention designed to give schools confidence in identifying programs, staff and resources that will improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for their students. It is available to view on the department’s website [here.](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/mental-health-menu/Pages/Menu.aspx?Redirect=1)

## **How were programs selected to be on the Menu?**

* The department completed an open competitive procurement process to develop the Full Menu.
* Programs were selected subject to meeting criteria of:
  + evidence in supporting student mental health and wellbeing outcomes (assessed by Centre for Program Evaluation at the University of Melbourne)
  + capacity of providers
  + useability by schools
  + value for money

1. **Can non-government schools access the Schools Mental Health Fund?**

* No. The Schools Mental Health Fund has been established for government schools, following Recommendation 17 of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System.
* Government schools must choose from the Menu in spending their Fund allocation.
* Non-government schools are welcome to use the Menu to inform their own mental health and wellbeing spending.

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