

HEPP69 Mental Health Policy

PURPOSE

To promote awareness and assistance to students and staff who experience mental health issues within the SCEI-HE teaching and learning environment. Student mental health and well-being is supported when curriculum and teaching practices engage students' hearts and minds and when the learning environment fosters a community of support, social connection and sense of belonging. SCEI-HE aims to promote positive mental health in its staff and students by providing a safe, healthy and supportive environment.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all students and staff of SCEI-HE. It is an overview of aims regarding the promotion of positive mental health in an educational environment and references committees and strategies that outline positive action towards the fulfilment of those aims.

DEFINITIONS

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| SCEI-HE | Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) |
| Mental Health Issue, concern or disorder | Any pre-existing or emergent psychological condition that impacts on student course progression or staff performance and creates anxiety in the individual. Issues or disorders may include (but are in no way limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Chronic anxiety disorder • Eating disorders • Addictive behaviours • Bipolar mood swings • Inability to focus on studies/duties |
| Mental Health Disorder Symptoms | SCEI-HE staff must be watchful for symptoms of mental health issues in staff or students, as the sufferer may not always volunteer information of pre-existing or emergent conditions. Among the signs and symptoms to watch for are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling sad or down • Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate • Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt • Extreme mood changes of highs and lows • Withdrawal from friends and activities • Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping • Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations • Inability to cope with daily problems or stress • Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people • Problems with alcohol or drug use |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major changes in eating habits • Excessive anger, hostility or violence • Fear for physical safety • Suicidal thinking or conversation • Bereavement grief |
| Mental Health Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any service, internal or external to SCEI-HE that is prepared to give support to students or staff suffering from a mental health issue, as defined above. Such services available in Victoria include: • Beyond Blue¹; 1800 RESPECT²; Lifeline³ ; GriefLine⁴ ; Butterfly Foundation⁵ ; Suicide Call Back Service⁶ ; Youth Substance Abuse Service⁷ ; MIND Australia Limited⁸ . • An example of an internal Mental Health Service would be the specialised Student Welfare staff with Mental Health First Aid training and qualifications in Psychology and Counselling. |

POLICY

SCEI-HE staff are pro-active in identifying students suffering under the weight of a mental health issue. The impact of a mental health issue may severely impact on a student’s capacity to progress with their studies, which will compound on their issue. Likewise, academic staff suffering mental health issues may impact on the delivery of course content and program quality.

SCEI-HE is dedicated to identifying and assisting students and staff presenting with mental health issues, and to the eradication of the stigma attached to persons exhibiting mental health disorders.

OBJECTIVES

SCEI-HE will promote positive mental health and respond to the needs of students and staff who present with mental health difficulties by:

- Encouraging students and staff to seek assistance if they experience mental health difficulties
- Promoting institute wide awareness of mental health issues that may erupt within and impact learning environments
- Providing guidance and training for SCEI-HE Student Welfare and Academic teaching staff to effectively respond to the needs of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties

¹ beyondblue.org.au

² 1800respect.org.au

³ lifeline.org.au

⁴ griefline.org.au/

⁵ thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

⁶ suicidecallbackservice.org.au

⁷ ysas.org.au

⁸ <https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/about-mind>

- Ensuring that all staff and students are made aware of the services, advice and trained staff available to respond to the needs of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties (e.g. EAP Programs constitute a service to staff)
- Reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness in the workplace/learning environment
- Clearly identifying major responsibilities of staff members to report mental health/wellbeing concerns to the appropriate channels, so the students can be best supported in a proactive manner (as opposed to reactive).
- To identify a process map for support for staff who are concerned about colleagues (e.g. to whom do they go for support?)

PROCEDURE

1. SCEI-HE provides the following student mental health well-being support services.
 - 1.1. Student Welfare Officers are available to discuss personal, physical, mental, or emotional issues and hardships (homelessness, severe depression, suicide and self-harm) that may arise for students during the course of their studies.
 - 1.2. Student Welfare Officers with current accreditation in Mental Health First Aid and are able to identify and assist students and staff with mental health concerns or illnesses as they affect studies, interpersonal relations, professional and personal life as well as capacity to undertake basic activities of daily living.
 - 1.3. There may be instances where a Student Welfare Office believes the student requires additional professional support than what is within their scope of practice/qualifications. In this situation, the Student Welfare Officer will refer the student to an external counselling service, General Practitioner (GP) or escorted to a hospital emergency department in a crisis situation. Any costs associated with the use of external professional external will be borne by the student/staff member (except in the case of a staff member using the services of an EAP program).
 - 1.4. Student Welfare will report the effectiveness of strategies and services in regard to the mental health and well-being of students and any critical incident records to the Mental Health Standing Committee.
2. Centralised oversight of the objectives of the Mental Health Policy is exercised by the Mental Health Standing Committee (MHSC). The MHSC is comprised of members of SCEI-HE staff with responsibility in regard to the mental well-being of students and staff. To learn how the membership of the MHSC is determined and managed, see the HETOR11 Mental Health Standing Committee Terms of Reference.
 - 2.1. The Mental Health Standing Committee oversees the development, implementation and evaluation of SCEI-HE's HEPP69 Mental Health Policy and Processes. The Mental Health Policy is an institute wide policy covering staff, students and internal SCEI-HE collectives. The Mental Health Standing Committee aims to work with different areas of the institute to meet the objectives of the policy.
 - 2.2. The Mental Health Standing Committee's ultimate responsibility is to work with relevant SCEI-HE Student Welfare and Academic teaching staff to evaluate the functionality and effectiveness of the measures contained in the HEPP69 Mental Health Policy.

- 2.3. The line of reporting to the MHSC will enable review of SCEI-HE's services in regard to the mental well-being of students and staff and enable revisions and enhancements to policy, processes, extension of services and additional staff training where indicated.
3. The Mental Health Standing Committee has specific functions and:
 - 3.1. Will facilitate provision and dissemination of appropriate information to the Boards and other relevant groups. In doing so, the Standing Committee will be cognisant of and respond to information from those groups.
 - 3.2. May request and obtain information relevant to the Student Welfare student mental health interventions, advice and records (de-identified) for the purpose of oversight, summation to SCEI-HE Boards and to the National Regulator and/or Education Department.
 - 3.3. Will assist Student Welfare in arranging an annual calendar of mental health awareness events for students and advocate for and/or apply to the relevant SCEI-HE body for funding of same.
 - 3.4. Will stand ready to be called to emergency meetings to address critical incidents involving the mental health of students/staff that require urgent strategic plans best addressed by the whole Standing Committee.
 - 3.5. Will ensure that its decisions, strategies and observations are disseminated and implemented at the appropriate levels within the Institute.
 - 3.6. Will remain reactive and considerate of the mental health needs of students and staff of SCEI-HE.
4. SCEI-HE Human Resources Management (HR) will be informed of, or otherwise liaise with SCEI-HE Welfare, in regard to staff who present with mental health difficulties:
 - 4.1. Where a teacher has presented with abnormal stress or other mental health difficulties and the supervising academic has made recommendation to involve HR in strategies to alleviate the problem
 - 4.2. Where administration or teaching staff present with mental health illness, concerns or disorders that indicate external services or consultation with SCEI-HE welfare and counselling officers may benefit the individual
 - 4.3. Where administration or teaching staff present with mental health conditions that may impair their function within their job role
 - 4.4. On presentation of a staff member with a mental health issue, the HR Officer or Manager may:
 - 4.4.1. ask the staff member what they feel the appropriate action would be or what they would like to do
 - 4.4.2. encourage the staff member to go home for the day to get some rest and/or clear their mind
 - 4.4.3. contact the staff member's emergency contact to make them aware and ask them to pick the staff member up (if staff member agrees to this)
 - 4.4.4. encourage the staff member to go and see their General Medical Practitioner
 - 4.4.5. suggest alternative or reduced work hours

- 4.4.6. suggest a period of time off work
 - 4.4.7. assist the staff member to work with their manager to create a support plan which may include reduced workload and/or additional support
 - 4.4.8. encourage the staff member to contact the company's registered EAP
5. SCEI-HE will continue to review and align its policies and processes in regard to student/staff mental well-being with the recommendations of the Higher Education Standards Panel report, *Improving Retention, Completion and Success in Higher Education*⁹.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

HETOR11 Mental Health Standing Committee

HEPP49 Student Welfare Policy

RightsEd: Tackling sexual harassment - Index

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/publications/rightsed-tackling-sexual-harassment-index>

Change The Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities (2017)

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/executive-summary-5>

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Improving retention, completion and success in higher education;

<https://www.education.gov.au/news/release-final-report-improving-retention-completion-and-success-higher-education>

Higher Education Standards Framework 2015;

<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/higher-education-standards-framework-2015>

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⁹ <https://www.education.gov.au/news/release-final-report-improving-retention-completion-and-success-higher-education>