

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

SUMMARY REPORT

BEYOND BLUE

FINAL REPORT

REPORT PERIOD

2020 – 2023

1. BACKGROUND

Formed 23 years ago, Beyond Blue is now Australia's most well-known and visited mental health organisation. It is focused on supporting people affected by anxiety, depression and suicide. Beyond Blue's **vision** is that all people in Australia achieve their best possible mental health and its **mission** during the 2020-2023 strategy period was to work with the community to improve mental health and prevent suicide.

The three-year **Beyond 2020 Strategy** (2020 - 2023) identified three priorities.

- Promoting mental health and wellbeing so people have greater knowledge, feel safe to talk openly about their issues, and are supported to ask for help when they need to.
- Being a trusted source of information, advice, and support so we can all better understand how to maintain our mental health and take steps to recover from mental health conditions.
- Working together to prevent suicide by playing a lead role in the national effort to prevent suicide through research, information, advice and support, and advocacy.

During this strategy period, Beyond Blue underwent an organisational transformation – **Enabling Beyond 2020** – to ensure its business and operational models enabled it to effectively deliver on its strategy, and be agile and responsive. The transformation effort was funded by Beyond Blue cash reserves.

As part of work on an **organisational Outcomes Framework**, a logic model and indicators to measure actions and outcomes were developed in line with Beyond Blue's strategy, business, and operational models. This defined Beyond Blue's intermediate outcomes for individuals and communities in line with its early intervention and prevention focus as increasing mental health literacy, confidence to act and prevention and management techniques, as well as policy and evidence building. Ultimately, it is expected these **outcomes** will contribute to:

- **people** have the knowledge, skills, confidence and opportunities to maintain good mental health, reduce their risk of suicide and have strategies and empathetic supports on-hand, to respond if they start to struggle
- **communities and social networks** – in families, neighbourhoods, educational settings, workplaces and online – work together to create non-stigmatising, respectful, and supportive spaces where everyone can achieve their best possible mental health, and play a role in preventing suicide
- **society** provides the structural supports and policies that support good mental health and prevent suicide, and provides safe, affordable access to the right type of support at the right time.

Beyond Blue has since released its new strategy, [*Beyond Blue Strategy 2023+. Earlier. Easier. Together.*](#) and while the strategy maintains elements of the overall organisational logic developed for the 2020 to 2023 strategy period, the planned approach to organisational outcomes measurement has been adjusted.

2. THE EVALUATION

ARTD was engaged in 2021 to design and deliver the fifth independent evaluation of Beyond Blue (2020–23). This fulfills the requirement of the Commonwealth Government’s grant contribution to Beyond Blue’s core activities. This is the final report of the evaluation.

The evaluation sought to answer 10 questions relating to Beyond Blue’s reach, outcomes, value for money, and role in the mental health ecosystem.

Domain	Evaluation question
Outcomes	1. To what extent has Beyond Blue contributed to its intended ultimate outcomes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> For individuals For communities For society?
	2. What are the immediate and intermediate outcomes that result from Beyond Blue’s activities?
	3. In what ways is Beyond Blue making the biggest difference?
Value for money	4. What value for money did Beyond Blue offer?
	5. How has Beyond Blue leveraged different funding sources to maximise value?
	6. How has Commonwealth funding received helped Beyond Blue achieve its outcomes?
Reach	7. Who did Beyond Blue reach and who did Beyond Blue not reach? What is contributing to this?
	8. How is Beyond Blue delivering on the vision of the Big Blue Door?
Ecosystem	9. How effective has Beyond Blue been in responding to changes in the external environment, community needs, and the mental health and suicide prevention ecosystems?
	10. How did Beyond Blue work with partner organisations to support outcomes?

This was done using a theory-based approach that incorporated a **contribution analysis** to strengthen the assessment of Beyond Blue’s contribution to mental health outcomes in the context of other factors within the system, and a **mixed-methods data synthesis** to transparently synthesise various data sources and report on the scale of outcomes supported and the quality of the evidence of these outcomes. The mixed-methods data synthesis was completed with a subgroup of the Independent Evaluation Advisory Committee, which oversaw the evaluation, and Beyond Blue’s Blue Voices members to bring expertise, including lived expertise, to the independent process.

The evaluation covers Beyond Blue's external facing activities during 2020–23. All key products and services are covered through reporting on Beyond Blue's business roles of information provision, service provision, and equipping community (Beyond Blue's work with people with lived experience as speakers, volunteers and Blue Voices members). Beyond Blue's other business roles – knowledge leader, policy advocate and incubator (Beyond Blue identifies ideas and shapes solutions to address unmet need and transfers these to relevant stakeholders) – are covered to a lesser extent. The evaluation does not cover the internal transformation process undertaken and funded by Beyond Blue reserves during this period, or its internal functions and processes.

This report primarily draws on administrative data on Beyond Blue's reach, evaluations and monitoring data available for products and services, engaged communities and policy advocacy, Beyond Blue's reports to the Commonwealth, and a population survey commissioned by Beyond Blue. These Beyond Blue data sources were supplemented with stakeholder interviews independently conducted by the evaluation team, and relevant academic literature and government reports. We have data for all key evaluation questions; however, there are some limitations.

- There is limited demographic data for some products and services (in part because of the commitment to providing service users the option of anonymity, a deliberate desire to not overburden service users with data capture, and the difficulty of capturing this information for some products and services), which makes it difficult to fully assess who Beyond Blue is reaching, who they are not, and why.
- It is difficult to synthesise outcomes across all products and services because different products and services use different outcomes measures to assess similar outcomes. It is also difficult to make definitive statements about Beyond Blue's contribution to higher level outcomes given the myriad factors impacting mental health, particularly during the last three years, and the ways in which Beyond Blue aims to help address and to leverage these other factors in its work.
- It is difficult to assess the value for money provided by an organisation, particularly a mental health organisation, given the non-linear nature of recovery. The findings on value for money should be considered partial, and something on which to build over time.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 RESPONSIVENESS TO THE ECOSYSTEM

At the outset of this strategy period, Beyond Blue could not have anticipated the unprecedented combination of events that would unfold between 2020–23 – from natural disasters through to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. These have contributed to widespread feelings of uncertainty and had a substantial impact on mental health and wellbeing. Beyond Blue was also particularly affected by COVID-19, with its head office located in Melbourne, which experienced the longest lockdowns in Australia.

In this context, there is evidence that Beyond Blue has responded well to changes in the ecosystem and the factors amplifying mental health concerns, and has leveraged these to advocate for and encourage an increased focus on mental health. This has been enabled by Beyond Blue’s preparedness, experience, brand, relationships and funding agility, with its ability to draw on a range of funding sources (including from all levels of government, philanthropy and donations) and its reserves to invest in strategic initiatives.

With specific, time-limited government funding, Beyond Blue responded to **COVID-19** by developing and rapidly standing up the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service (CMWSS) and adapting the existing NewAccess program (that Beyond Blue had developed to be delivered to a range of population groups funded through Primary Health Networks (PHNs), and had already adapted for workplaces) into a national program tailored to support small business owners. They were also able to use the existing Be You infrastructure to provide tailored supports for educators at a time when they were under significant pressure with virtual schooling.

Following a specific request from the Australian Government, and with additional funding, Beyond Blue responded to the **Victorian Black Summer bushfires** by adapting Be You to the context of bushfire recovery and providing targeted support to affected schools and early learning centres. Following a further funding request from the Victorian Government, it also adapted NewAccess to respond and provide targeted supports to communities in north-eastern Victoria affected by the bushfires. In 2021, this program was expanded through a statewide telehealth service supporting all Victorians affected by the impact of COVID-19, with a further extension of services in early 2023 to support **flood affected regional communities**.

Ahead of current **cost of living concerns** in early 2020, Beyond Blue recognised the importance of the connection between money and mental health and partnered with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to better understand this connection and take proactive action. With the growing concerns, they have leaned into further work on financial wellbeing, partnering with Financial Counselling Australia (FCA) to develop information and practical guidance and engage stakeholders through webinars.

The story of The Way Back Support Service – which was iteratively developed over 10 years before being handed over to state and territory governments and PHNs in June 2023 –

effectively illustrates Beyond Blue's business role as an incubator of new models of care, and its ability to respond to emerging concerns, as well as proactively meet and advocate for funding to meet community needs.

Overall, stakeholders were highly positive about Beyond Blue's strategic response to changes in the mental health and suicide prevention ecosystem. Most stakeholders also felt Beyond Blue's approach to partnership had improved over time and that it had cultivated positive relationships with corporate and community partners, who valued the experience and benefits of partnering. However, the corporate and community partner survey indicated that, on average, partners were less clear about the outcomes achieved through their partnerships. Some interviewees identified challenges in working with Beyond Blue, including an initial lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, and Beyond Blue's internal 'bureaucracy', which they thought slowed processes and limited the potential of products produced through the partnerships. Some stakeholders also had misperceptions about why Beyond Blue entered specific areas and then stepped back.

3.2 OUTCOMES

The first steps in contribution analysis are to identify whether implementation occurred in line with the logic model and whether there is a sound reason to believe that what was implemented will support outcomes. Beyond Blue **implemented products and services** and undertook its business roles in line with the organisational logic model (which was aligned to its strategy and business roles). Government stakeholders perceived a need for Beyond Blue's focus on prevention and early intervention. Beyond Blue's actions are also in line with **evidence** for digital technologies, prevention and stigma reduction, and so should contribute to improvements in mental health.

SERVICE USER EXPERIENCE

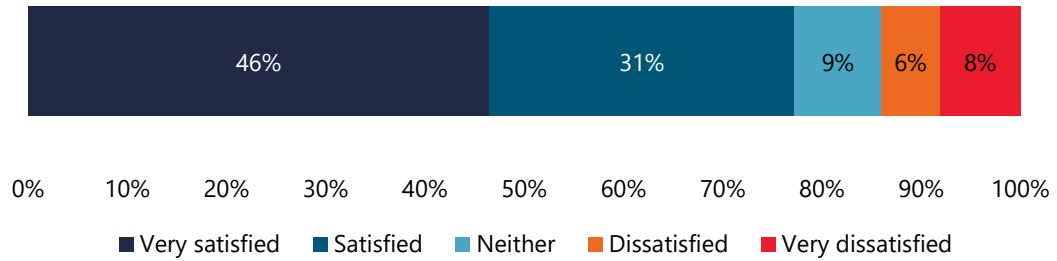
Overall, data show most people have a positive experience accessing Beyond Blue's core products and services and Beyond Blue supported services. Users report high levels of satisfaction, and most would recommend Beyond Blue's products and services to others.

Users of Beyond Blue's **Support Service** and **CMWSS** reported high levels of satisfaction. More than three-quarters of Support Service and CMWSS users were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience (77%; see Figure 1). Almost all Support Service users (90%) reported they received the information they were seeking¹, and 81% indicated the advice provided was useful to them².

¹ "Did you receive the information that you were seeking?" - Yes, completely = 60%; Yes, partially = 30%; No = 10%.

² Source: Support Service user survey (4 Mar 2022 – 30 June 2023). N = 1,380.

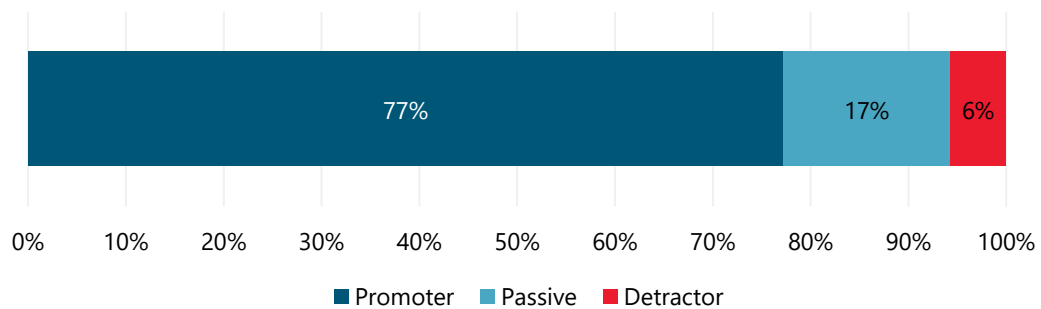
FIGURE 1. SATISFACTION OF SUPPORT SERVICE AND CMWSS USERS



Source: Support Service survey data (Jan 2021 - Aug 2021, Nov - 2021) & CMWSS survey data (1 Jan 2021 – 30 Nov 2021). N = 11,266. Note: These data relate to delivery of the service by the previous provider. This measure is not collected by the current provider.

Users of the Support Service are also very likely to recommend the service to others. According to the Net Promoter Score (NPS) methodology³, more than three quarters of respondents are considered promoters and only 6% are categorised as detractors (see Figure 2). The Support Service received a net promoter score of 71, which is considered excellent.⁴

FIGURE 2. SUPPORT SERVICE USER NET PROMOTER SCORE

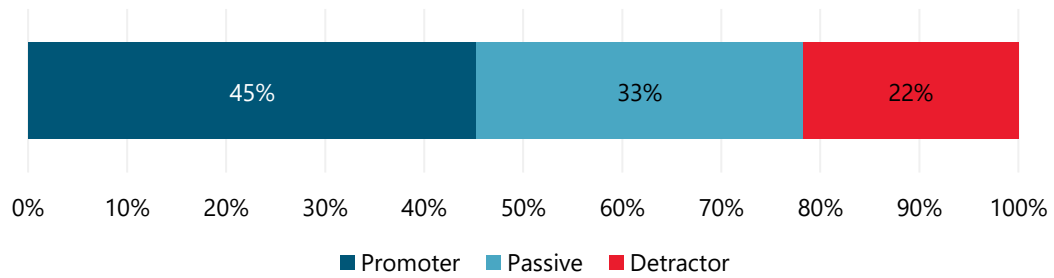


Source: Support Service survey data (6 Mar 2022 – 30 Jun 2023). N = 15,125.

User satisfaction is also high for people accessing Beyond Blue’s **Forums**. Almost half of respondents are considered promoters and about one-in-five are detractors (see Figure 3). The Forums received a net promoter score of 24, which is considered favourable.

³ Participants asked: “On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend the Beyond Blue Online Forums to someone in a similar situation to you?”. Promoters = 9-10; Passive = 8-7; Detractor = 0-6.

⁴ According to Bain & Company, the creators of the NPS methodology.

FIGURE 3. FORUM USER NET PROMOTER SCORE

Source: Forum users surveys, data collected between 24 May 2022 – 7 June 2022, and 16 Feb 2023 – 23 Feb 2023 (n = 1,065). Note: Data collected at two points in time.

Participant satisfaction is also very high for Beyond Blue's supported services.

The **Way Back Support Service** evaluation report found that 93% of participants were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service;⁵ however, this is based on a low response rate.⁶ The most common factors influencing participant satisfaction were participants' relationship with their support coordinator (83%), the information and advice they received from their support coordinator (73%) and the amount of time spent with their support coordinator (67%).

Users' experience of **Be You** has been similarly positive.⁷ NPS scores for Be You resources ranged from 32 to 66, reflecting 'favourable' or 'excellent' satisfaction⁸. For comparison, Australian benchmarks in 2022 reported an NPS of 21 for the education sector, and 43 for the non-for-profit sector.⁹

NewAccess delivered through PHNs achieved a high retention rate of 78%, suggesting most clients were satisfied with the program.

New Access for Small Business (NASBO) clients also reported high levels of satisfaction. Of those who responded to the evaluation survey, 97% felt listened to, 94% felt as though their individuality and values were respected and 89% felt they received the help that mattered to them. The program had a retention rate of 69%.¹⁰

OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS

Beyond Blue's core products – the Support Service and Forums – are leading to positive outcomes.

⁵ Very satisfied = 74%; Satisfied = 19%.

⁶ The evaluation had lower than expected respondents to the participant survey (n =79). It was expected that the evaluation would receive a minimum of 580 responses.

⁷ Source: Be You User Survey Report 2022.

⁸ According to Bain & Company, the creators of the NPS methodology, scores about 20 are 'favourable', and scores above 50 are 'excellent'.

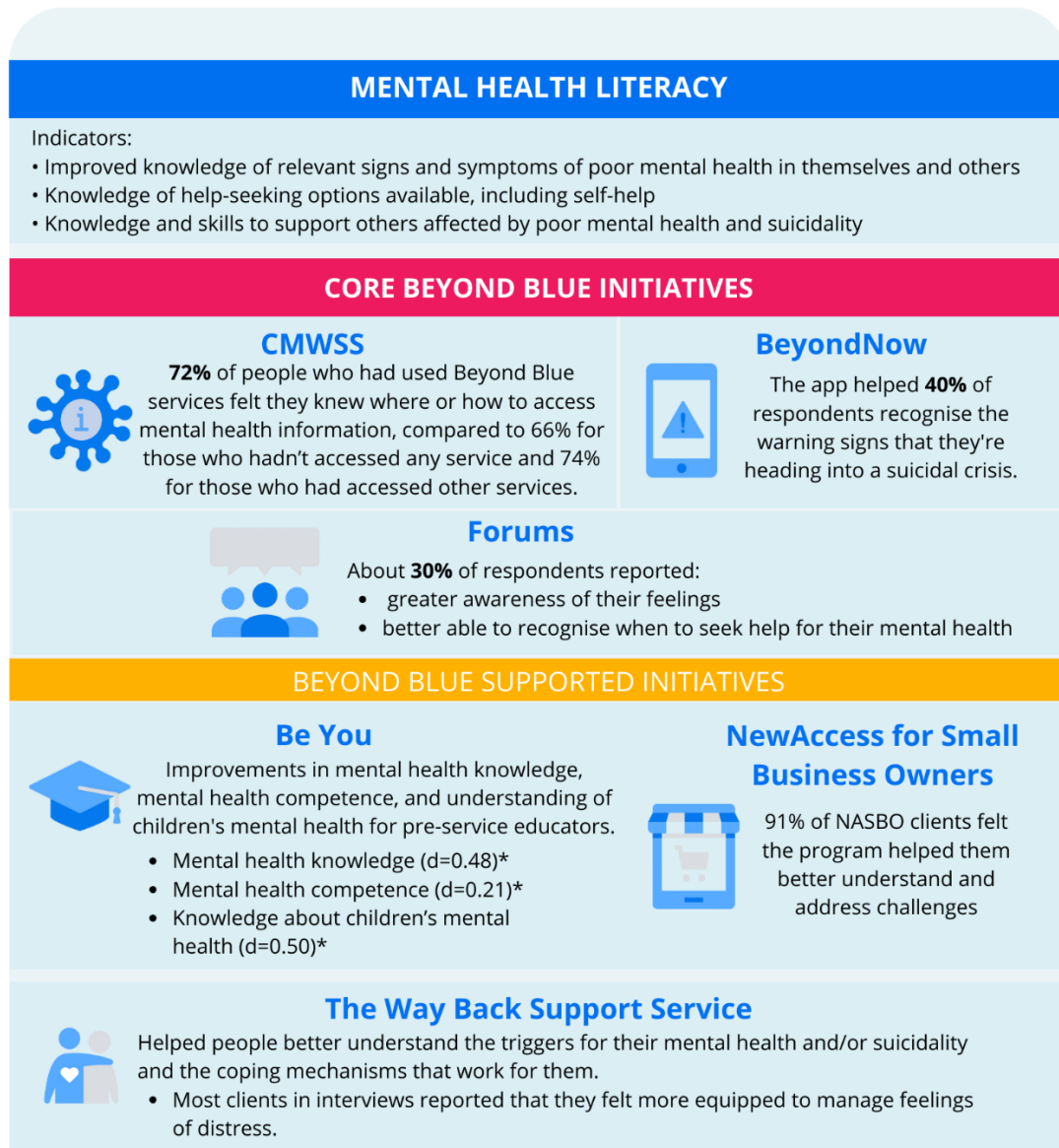
⁹ Perceptive. 2022 NPS Industry Benchmarks.

¹⁰ Retention rate refers to the percentage of people who have 'planned exits' from the program out of all who exited the program during the period.

Overall, monitoring and evaluation data suggest Beyond Blue’s core and supported products and services are having a small to medium positive impact (as defined by the definitions used in the mixed methods data synthesis detailed in the full report) **on mental health literacy** (e.g. greater knowledge of mental health and recognitions of the signs of poor mental health), **confidence to act** (reduced shame and increased help seeking), and **the use of prevention and management techniques**. However, the quality of outcomes data varies significantly across products and services.

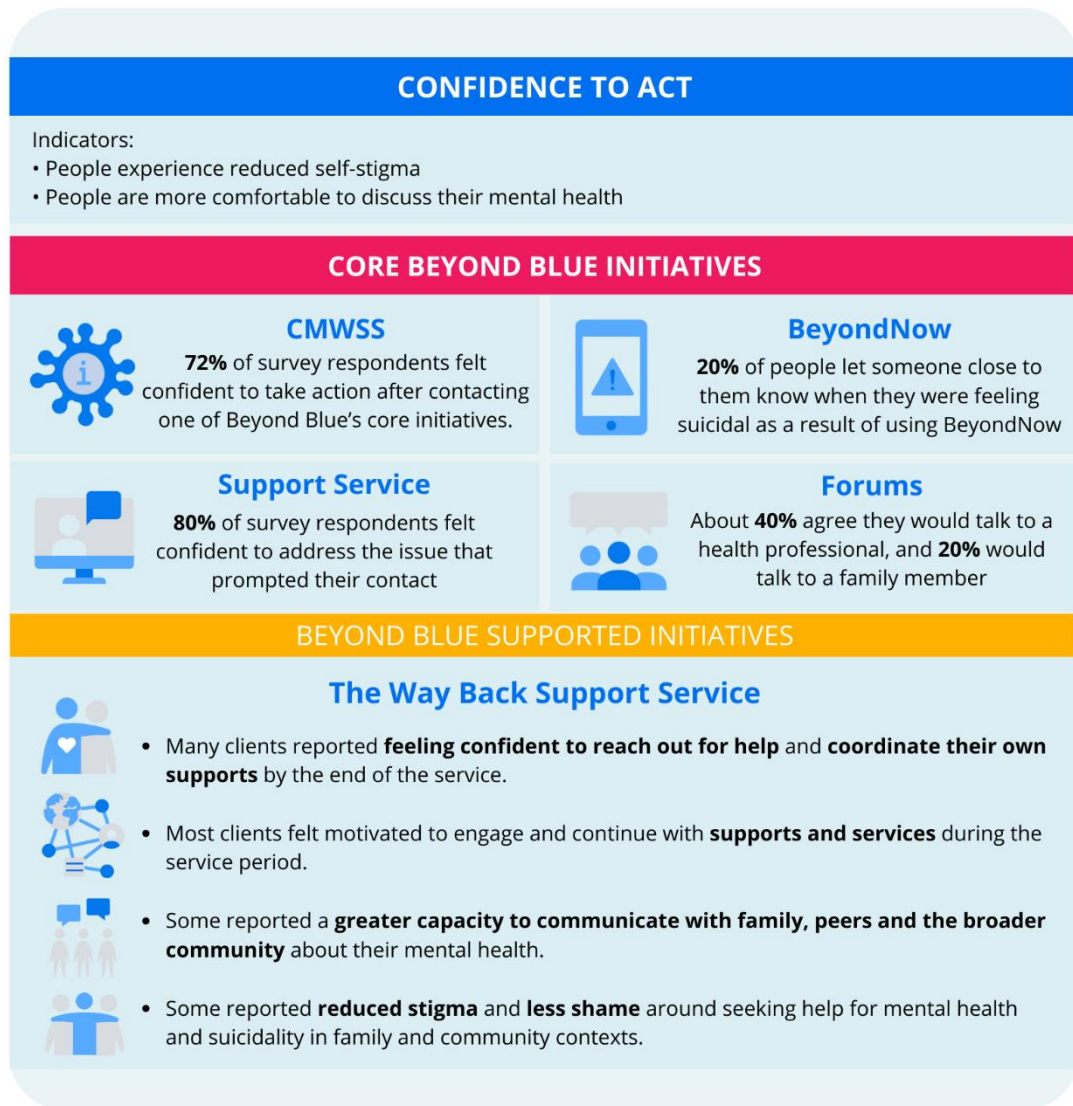
Almost all data sources reviewed (11 out of 12) as part of the MMDS indicate that the Beyond Blue product or service improved mental health literacy in a small or moderate way. This was either part of the design of the initiative (for example, CMWSS, Be You and The Way Back Support Service) or supported more indirectly (for example, BeyondNow). Figure 4 illustrates key mental health literacy outcomes supported by Beyond Blue’s core and supported initiatives.

FIGURE 4. MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY OUTCOMES



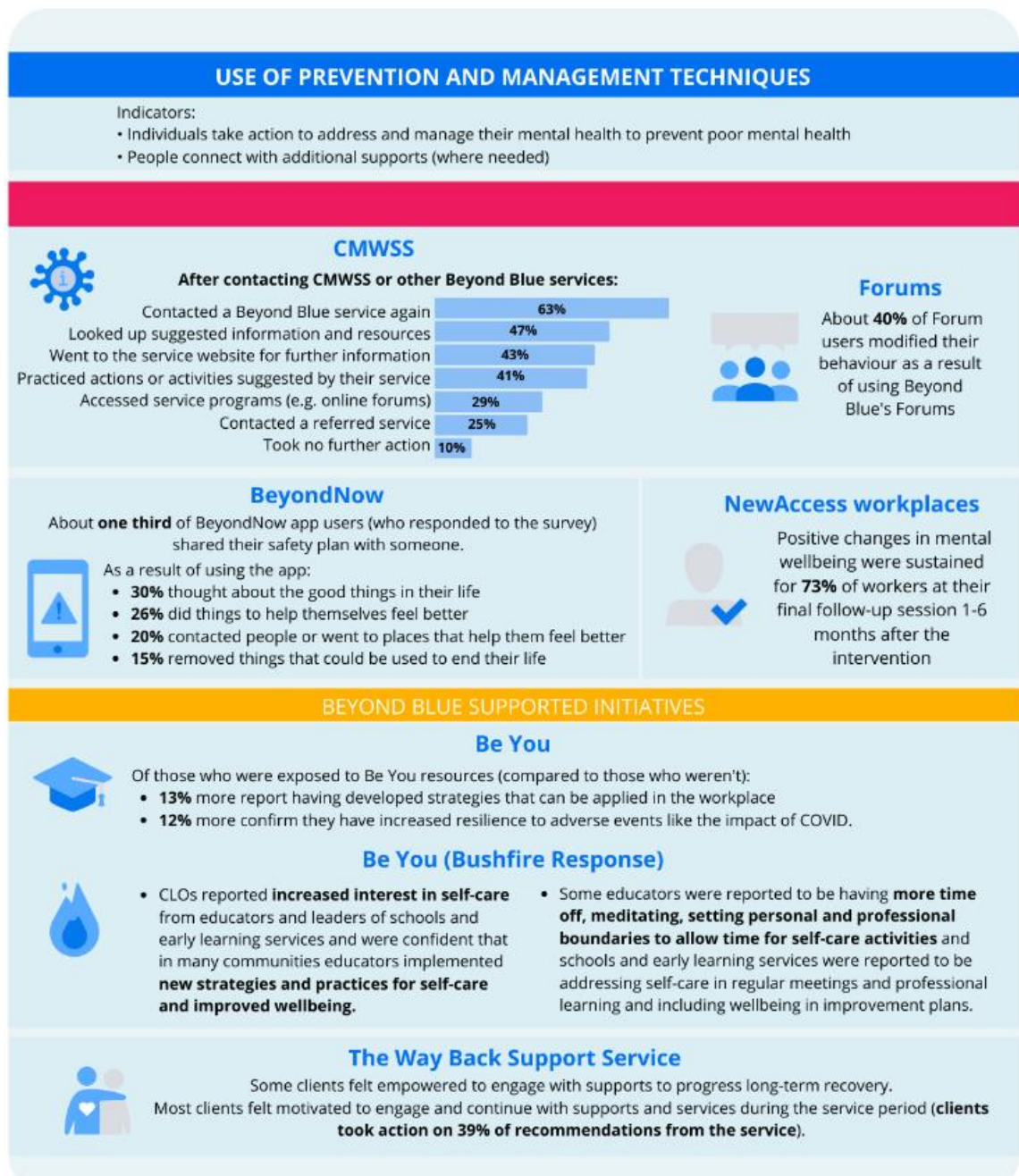
For most data sources reviewed (10 out of 13), the Beyond Blue product or service increased confidence to act in ways that supported users’ mental health and wellbeing. This included feeling confident to reach out for help or taking actions, such as engaging with supports. Figure 5 illustrates key confidence to act outcomes supported by Beyond Blue’s core and supported initiatives.

FIGURE 5. CONFIDENCE TO ACT OUTCOMES



For most data sources reviewed (11 out of 14) as part of the MMDS the Beyond Blue product or service had improved people’s use of prevention and management techniques. Figure 6 illustrates key outcomes.

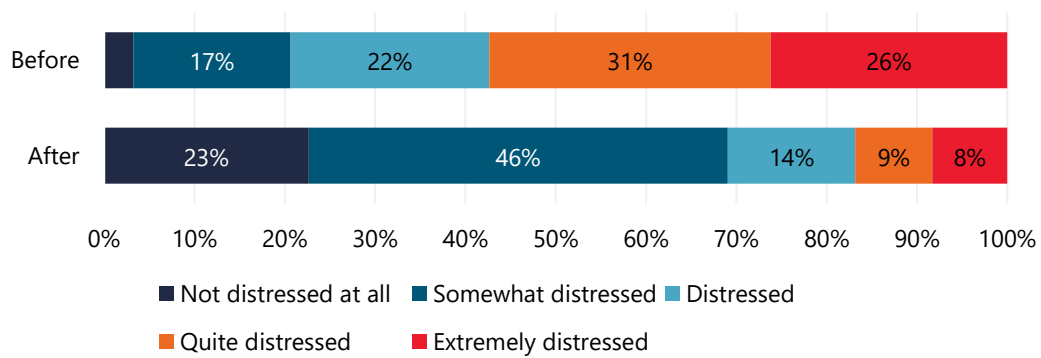
FIGURE 6. USE OF PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES OUTCOMES



Where data were collected, on average, people reported significant reductions in distress after accessing Beyond Blue's core products.

On average, people reported significant reductions in distress after accessing Beyond Blue's Support Service and CMWSS (from 80% who felt distressed or worse before contact to 31% after; see Figure 7).

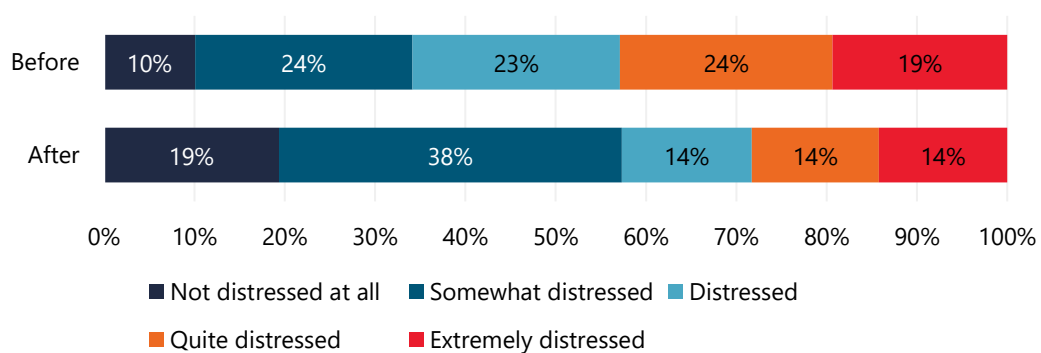
FIGURE 7. LEVELS OF DISTRESS FOR SUPPORT SERVICE AND CMWSS USERS, BEFORE AND AFTER CONTACTING BEYOND BLUE



Source: Support Service survey data (Jan 2021 - Aug 2021, Nov - 2021) & CMWSS survey data (1 Jan 2021 – 30 Nov 2021). N = 11,266.

Forum users also experienced reductions in distress (from 66% before contact to 43% after; see Figure 8), as well as other outcomes, such as feeling heard and understood (86%) and hopeful (73%).

FIGURE 8. DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS OF DISTRESS, BEFORE AND AFTER ACCESSING FORUMS



Source: Forum users surveys, data collected between 24 May 2022 – 7 June 2022, and 16 Feb 2023 – 23 Feb 2023 (n = 527).

NewAccess for communities (funded through PHNs) achieved high recovery rates of around 70%.

The **Way Back Support Service** achieved a 28% reduction in psychological distress, as measured by the K10.¹¹ The Way Back Support Service also led to:

- 86% improvement in wellbeing (as measured by the WHO-5)
- 63% reduction in suicidal ideation (as measured by the SIDAS)¹²

¹¹ Source: The Way Back Support Service evaluation report.

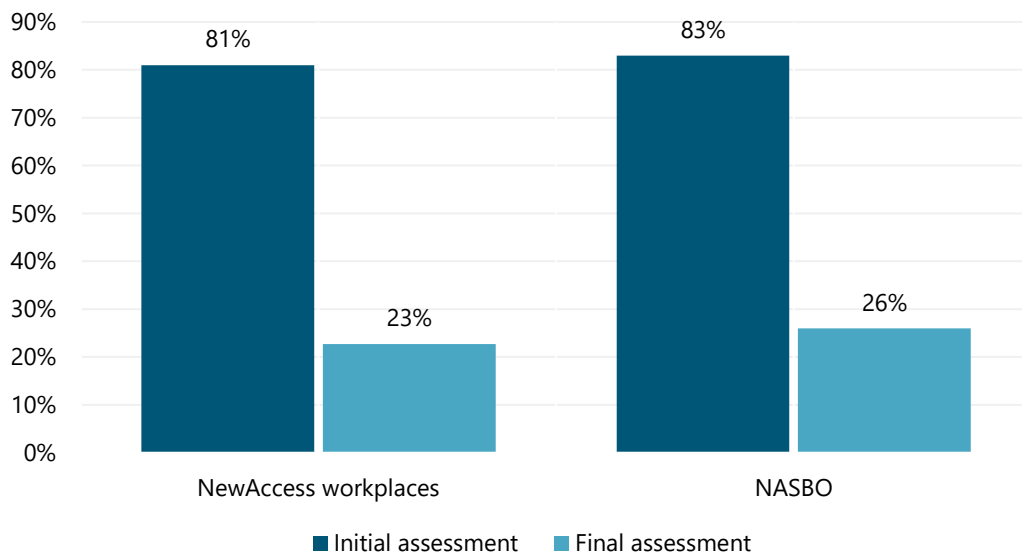
¹² Outcome measures were recorded at the beginning and end of support episodes. Matched pair data was available for 17 – 22% of episodes.

OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES

Be You supported significant improvements in educators' mental health knowledge, self-efficacy and positive wellbeing (with effect sizes ranging from small to medium; Cohen's $d = 0.18 - 0.51$).¹³ **Be You** has also achieved a range of positive outcomes for students, particularly from secondary schools, such as reductions in negative feelings and behaviours ($d=0.63$) and increased social ($d=0.43$) and emotional skills ($d=0.42$). There are indications **Be You** has also had a positive impact on student academic achievement; however, the effects are very small and may only be of practical significance in Year 7 ($d=0.23$).¹⁴

NewAccess Workplaces (via Comcare) and **NewAccess for Small Business Owners (NASBO)** both achieved high recovery rates of around 70% (see Figure 9). Those accessing **NewAccess Workplaces** achieved, on average, a significant reduction in the impact of mental health difficulties on work and social adjustment,¹⁵ and a significant reduction in other types of anxiety not covered by the recovery rate.¹⁶ There is also evidence that clients of **NewAccess Workplaces** achieved sustained recovery. Of those who engaged in follow up, 95% were below the clinical cut off at one month, and 92% were below the clinical cut off at six months.

FIGURE 9. PROPORTION OF CLIENTS ABOVE CLINICAL CUT-OFF AT INITIAL AND FINAL ASSESSMENT FOR NEWACCESS AND NASBO



Source: **NewAccess Workplaces** evaluation and **NASBO** monitoring data (July 2021 – May 2023).

¹³ Cohen's d is a standardised effect size for measuring the difference between two group means. It is typically interpreted as: $d=0.2$ small effect size; $d=0.5$ medium effect size; $d=0.8$ large effect size.

¹⁴ Source: **Be You** Student Outcomes report.

¹⁵ Reduction in Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS) score from 15.7 to 7.5. The WSAS assesses the impact of an individual's mental health difficulties on their ability to function in terms of work, home management, social leisure, private leisure and personal or family relationships.

¹⁶ Reduction in IAPT phobia scale from 4.3 to 1.6. The IAPT phobia scale is used to identify types of anxiety not covered by GAD-7, particularly social phobia, agoraphobia and specific phobias.

OUTCOMES OF EQUIPPING COMMUNITIES

Beyond Blue's **engaged communities** appear to be satisfied with their experience. Of those who responded to the survey, 82% indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience, and only 5% indicated they were dissatisfied. More than two-thirds reported high levels of trust and feelings of being treated with compassion by Beyond Blue.¹⁷

Beyond Blue's engaged community members also reported benefitting from their contribution to Beyond Blue. Members felt their contribution has had a positive impact on their personal mental health (81% significantly, moderately or slightly agreed) and helped to support their recovery (72% significantly, moderately or slightly agreed). They also feel they have been able to enhance other people's understanding and make a positive difference to the broader community.

There is evidence Beyond Blue's engaged community members are taking action to amplify Beyond Blue's messages through individual conversations as well as events. Most engaged community survey respondents feel their contribution has **given them the opportunity to enhance other people's understanding**¹⁸ and **made a positive difference to the broader community**.¹⁹

OUTCOMES OF POLICY ADVOCACY

During this strategy period, Beyond Blue made 17 policy submissions. Noting that policy influence can take some time to flow through, available data recorded by Beyond Blue illustrate several occasions where input from Beyond Blue through formal submissions has been reflected in interim and final outcomes, for example:

- **Select Committee Inquiry into Cost of Living** – the interim report includes discussion about the impact on mental health, consistent with Beyond Blue's submission
- **Measuring What Matters Framework** – the first draft of this includes measures for mental health, in line with Beyond Blue's submission
- **National Preventative Health Strategy** – while initially not included, the final Strategy included mental health as a priority area, reflecting Beyond Blue's submission.

Beyond Blue is viewed by stakeholders as a highly engaged and effective **policy advocate**, at the national level, even in the context of other factors influencing policy. The Way Back Support Service is a notable example of Beyond Blue's work in this area, particularly its significant contribution in advocating for the current investment in universal access to aftercare through the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

¹⁷ "Treated with compassion by Beyond Blue" – Strongly (71%); Moderately (21%).

"Like you can trust Beyond Blue" – Strongly (68%); Moderately (27%).

¹⁸ "Given you the opportunity to enhance other people's understanding" – Significantly (69%); Moderately (26%).

¹⁹ "Made a positive difference to the broader community" – Significantly (69%); Moderately (26%).

OUTCOMES FOR RESEARCH/ KNOWLEDGE LEADER & CATALYST

Since July 2020, Beyond Blue has co-funded 15 research projects with 11 different Australian universities and research institutes across a range of topics in mental health, contributing an estimated \$2.5m in in-kind funding support. Research projects funded through grants have produced 16 peer reviewed publications, in top tier journals, with more journal articles in the pipeline. These articles have an average of 7 citations each, noting that all of these were published recently. Research Partnerships Grant Scheme participants reported that Beyond Blue's support extended beyond funding (although this was critical) to professional development and support for researchers and connections with key mental health experts. These contributions were highly valued, although participants would have liked to see more sustained support over the life of the project and beyond the project, as they identified Beyond Blue could help enhance the impact of their research.

Beyond Blue has translated research into practical tools, in particular on financial wellbeing resources in collaboration with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) and Financial Counselling Australia (FCA) that explain the relationship between financial wellbeing and mental health and provide suggestions on ways individuals can better support themselves.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS BEYOND BLUE CONTRIBUTED TO ITS INTENDED ULTIMATE OUTCOMES?

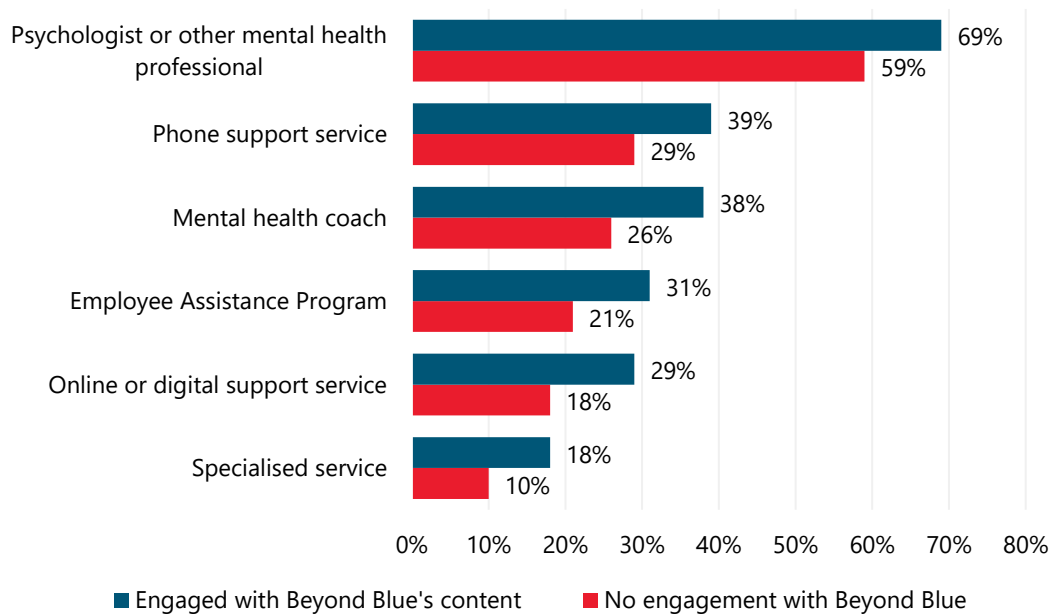
Beyond Blue's vision – that all people in Australia achieve their best possible mental health – is affected by a range of factors outside of Beyond Blue's activities, particularly during the last three years, with many factors contributing to a decline in mental health, but others that are likely having a positive impact.

There is an indication from Beyond Blue's population level survey of at least some notable differences in mental health literacy, confidence to act, and the use of prevention and management techniques among those using Beyond Blue services compared to those who are not. Because these data were collected at one time point, we cannot attribute these differences to Beyond Blue.

Those who had engaged with Beyond Blue reported greater confidence in areas relating to **mental health literacy**. Beyond Blue users were statistically significantly more confident in knowing where to go for information about mental health, how to recognise someone experiencing a mental health issue or suicidal thoughts or behaviours, and how to support someone experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviours.

Participants who had engaged with Beyond Blue's content²⁰ were also statistically significantly **more likely to intend to seek help** from other supports than those who had not engaged with Beyond Blue (see Figure 10).

²⁰ Had visited the website, followed Beyond Blue on social media, read a handout or brochure or listened to the podcast but had not used a Beyond Blue service or been supported by Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

FIGURE 10. INTENTIONS TO SEEK HELP FOR BEYOND BLUE USERS VS. NON-USERS

Source: Beyond Blue's population-level survey.

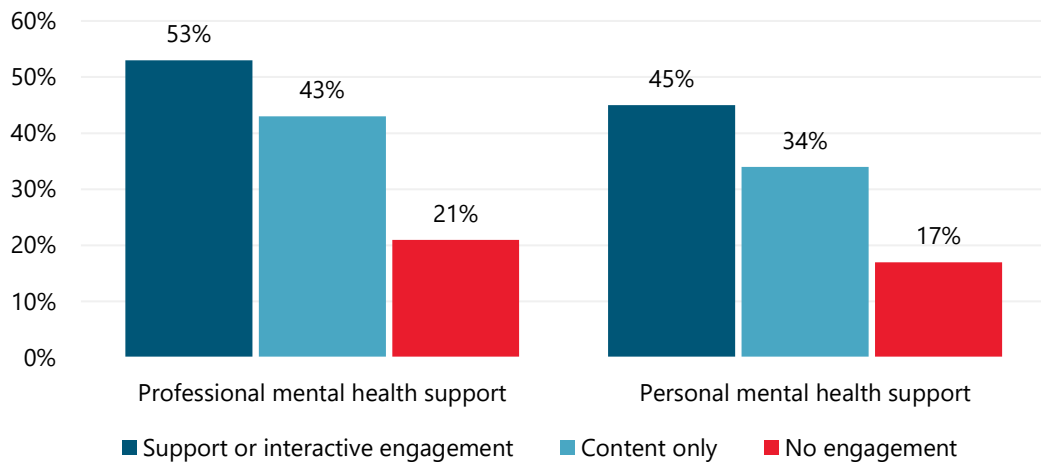
Beyond Blue's products and services prompted people to seek additional mental health information and support. About 50% of people said they took action because of their engagement with Beyond Blue. The most common actions were looking up other mental health information online (28%), speaking to friends and family about mental health (23%), and speaking to a doctor/GP about mental health (17%). Those who had accessed support or had an interactive engagement with Beyond Blue²¹ were more likely to take action (68%) compared to those who only engaged with Beyond Blue's content²² (45%).

People accessing Beyond Blue's products and services were also **more likely** to have sought **professional or personal mental health support** in the past 12 months (see Figure 11).

²¹ Had used a Beyond Blue service including phone support service, webchat, online peer forum, or had engaged through workplace / school or volunteered with Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

²² Had visited the website, followed Beyond Blue on social media, read a handout or brochure or listened to the podcast but had not used a Beyond Blue service or been supported by Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

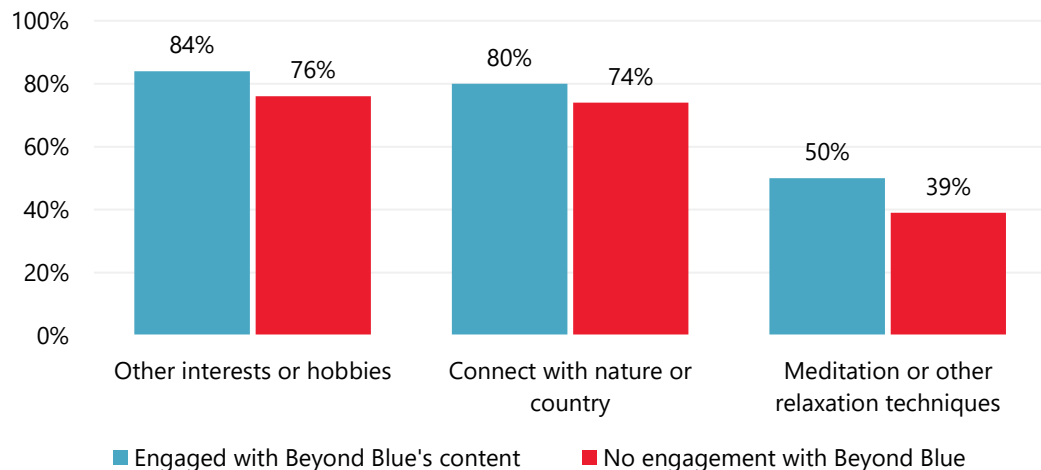
FIGURE 11. ACCESSING PROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO ACCESSED BEYOND BLUE SUPPORT, BEYOND BLUE CONTENT, AND NO ENGAGEMENT



Source: Beyond Blue’s population-level survey.

People who had engaged with Beyond Blue’s content²³ **reported greater use of prevention and self-management techniques.** Beyond Blue users were statistically significantly more likely to make time for other interests or hobbies, connect with nature or country, and make time for meditation or other relaxation techniques (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12. SELF-MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES, BEYOND BLUE USERS VS. NON-USERS



Source: Beyond Blue’s population-level survey.

²³ Had visited the website, followed Beyond Blue on social media, read a handout or brochure or listened to the podcast but had not used a Beyond Blue service or been supported by Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

IN WHAT WAYS IS BEYOND BLUE MAKING THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE?

Stakeholders perceive Beyond Blue as having the biggest impact on **reducing stigma** and **encouraging help seeking**, supported by their scale and brand recognition. Stakeholders feel that Beyond Blue's work has helped to normalise conversations about mental health and wellbeing. Beyond Blue's active role in **advocacy** has been important for **raising awareness** of mental health concerns generally. Stakeholders recognise how effectively Beyond Blue leverage their own profile and strategic relationships to elevate the conversation around mental health.

This is supported by Beyond Blue's **low intensity supports** and **prevention** work. Beyond Blue is seen as an **accessible starting point** for people experiencing concerns at the low end of the mental health spectrum. Beyond Blue's core products and services fill a gap for people facing long wait times to access more intensive clinical support. Beyond Blue also provide a variety of services, enabling them to reach people in many different settings. This **accessibility** encourages help seeking, providing many modes of connecting to support through non-clinical pathways.

These outcomes are enabled by Beyond Blue's **brand** as a trusted source of mental health advice and support. This allows them to reach more people, amplify their work, and advocate effectively.

Staff emphasised that Beyond Blue has also developed **strong relationships** with sector partners and governments. They are trusted by government for being able to develop services that address community needs, in partnership with other service providers.

3.3 REACH

Beyond Blue's delivers information, support and advice to the Australian community, adopting an inclusive approach to all services, but does not provide specialised services to different population subgroups. Beyond Blue also aims to reduce duplication in the sector by connecting people to other supports, where appropriate. It aims to act as a Big Blue Door providing accessible, personalised, safe and connected mental health support for all people who engage with Beyond Blue.

Beyond Blue has reached many people through its core products and services and Beyond Blue supported services. The population-level survey suggests about 1 in 8 Australians have engaged with Beyond Blue's content²⁴ in the past 12 months, and about 1 in 25 have accessed interactive support²⁵. As a **brand**, Beyond Blue is almost universally recognised.

From July 2020 to June 2023, Beyond Blue had an average audience reach of over 235 million per year and received over 225,000 media mentions (print, online, radio and TV mediums).

²⁴ Had visited the website, followed Beyond Blue on social media, read a handout or brochure or listened to the podcast but had not used a Beyond Blue service or been supported by Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

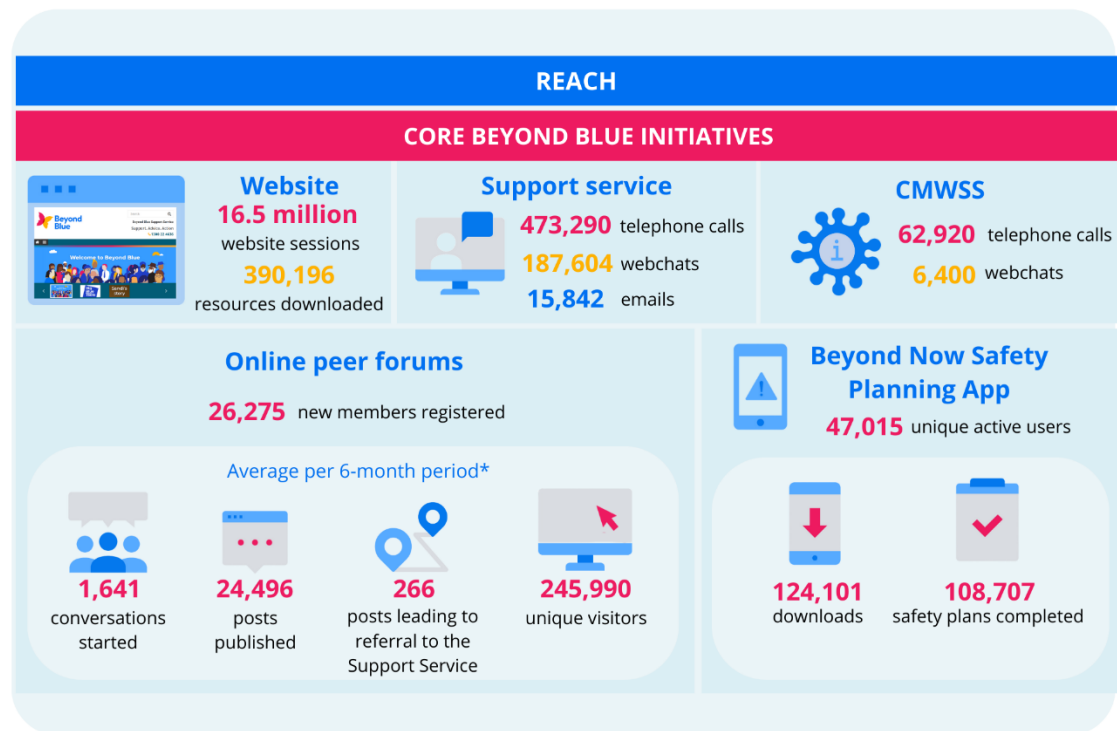
²⁵ Had used a Beyond Blue service including phone support service, webchat, online peer forum, or had engaged through workplace / school or volunteered with Beyond Blue in the past 12 months.

For each six-month period, it reached an average of 4.2 million people on Facebook and almost 900,000 people on Instagram. Over the three-year period, Beyond Blue had a total of 4 million organic impressions on its Twitter content and 2.5 million impressions on its LinkedIn content.²⁶

Data suggest Beyond Blue has significant reach across Australia through its core products and services and Beyond Blue supported services. From July 2020 to June 2023, the Beyond Blue and Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service (CMWSS) websites have had over 16 million visits, and more than 390,000 resources have been downloaded. In that time, the Support Service has received more than 473,000 calls, 187,000 webchats, and answered more than 15,000 emails. In addition, the CMWSS answered over 62,000 phone calls and 6,400 webchats. Beyond Blue’s online community Forums averaged almost 250,000 unique visitors over a six-month period.

From July 2020 to June 2023, the BeyondNow safety planning app had over 47,000 unique active users, and a monthly average of 13,390 users. During this period, 108,707 safety plans were created, 49,687 plans were shared and 124,101 downloads were completed.²⁷

FIGURE 13. OVERALL REACH FOR CORE BEYOND BLUE INITIATIVES



Note: Data from 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2023, unless otherwise specified. *Figures averaged per six-month period as data not available for all reporting periods.

As of September 2022, The Way Back Support Service had established 38 sites in seven states and territories. It supported over 20,000 people between its inception and 2023.²⁸

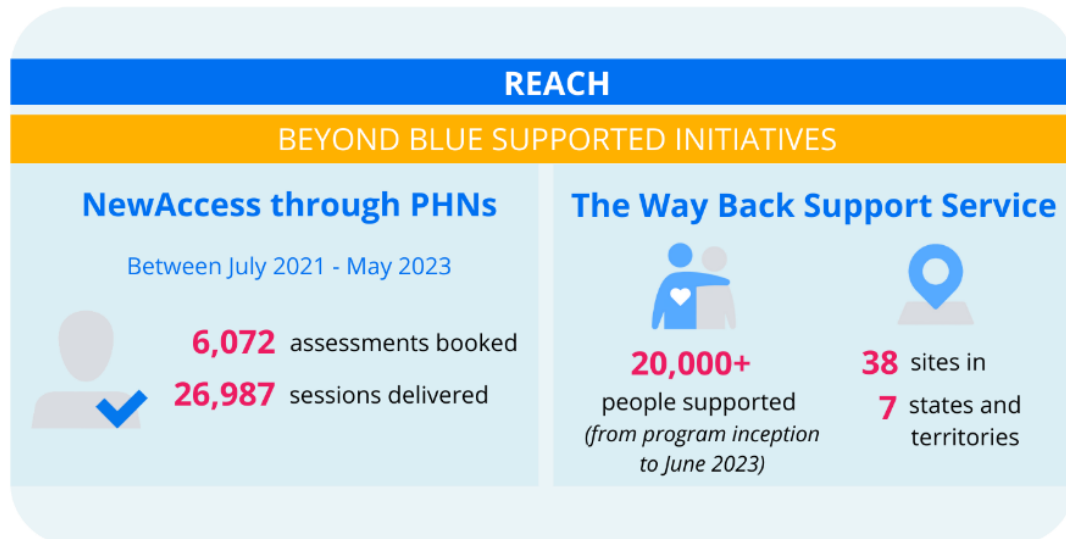
²⁶ Source: Data from Beyond Blue’s Commonwealth reports covering July 2020 to June 2023.

²⁷Source: BeyondNow monitoring data.

²⁸ Source: Commonwealth report (Jan – June 2023)

Between July 2021 and May 2023, more than 6,000 people accessed 27,000 NewAccess sessions delivered to individuals through 13 PHNS located in Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales.

FIGURE 14. OVERALL REACH FOR BEYOND BLUE SUPPORTED INITIATIVES



Note: Data from 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2023, unless otherwise specified.

Beyond Blue has reached people from **all states and territories**, as well as **regional and remote areas**, broadly in proportion to the size of their populations. People of all ages have accessed Beyond Blue, with digital platforms, such as Beyond Blue's Forums and the BeyondNow safety app, having greater reach to younger people. Females are over-represented across all of Beyond Blue's products and services, which reflects population mental health and service access trends.

Beyond Blue has significant reach into **schools**. Since 2018, when Be You brought together various Australian Government schools initiatives, it has registered approximately four times the number of schools as its predecessor programs and achieved a ten-fold growth in reach into early learning centres. As of July 2023, Be You has registered 70% of all primary, secondary, independent and Catholic schools, and about 1 in 3 early learning services, in Australia. It also has reach into all states and territories, regional and remote areas, and has supported over 170,000 educators.

Beyond Blue has reached significant numbers of individuals in **workplaces** through NewAccess for Small Business Owners (NASBO) and NewAccess Workplaces (delivered to the Australian Public Service via Comcare). Both have higher reach into female-owned industries than male, which is in line with other Beyond Blue services and mental health services more generally.

Beyond Blue also has a large, **engaged community** of Blue Voices members (6,000), Speakers (200), Ambassadors (15) and volunteers (8,000) based across the country. Priority populations are well represented among Blue Voices members – 10% identify as gender diverse, 23% identify as LGBTIQ+, 20% are from culturally diverse communities, and 8% are

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. These engaged communities have an important role in enhancing Beyond Blue's reach into the community through events and other engagements. Over the 3-year period of this evaluation, the total estimated audience from Speakers and Ambassador engagements has increased from 155,409 in the first year, to 300,918 in the second and 327,407 in the third (including in-person and virtual event attendance, as well as the Beyond Blue – and its partners' – websites and several associated social media channels).

FIGURE 15. OVERALL REACH FOR BEYOND BLUE'S EQUIPPING COMMUNITY BUSINESS ROLE



Note: Data from 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2023, unless otherwise specified. *Averaged across six Commonwealth reporting periods, from July 2020 to June 2023.

Over the past three years, Beyond Blue has undertaken actions to transform its core products and services – the website, Support Service and Forums – along with its business system infrastructure to progress the Big Blue Door and enhance reach. With an increasing focus on digital capability and referral pathways, individuals accessing any of Beyond Blue's services can be better connected to other organisations that are best placed to support people from particular demographic groups or with particular mental health conditions. However, staff acknowledged there is still further work to be done to progress the vision of the Big Blue Door.

Stakeholders generally felt that Beyond Blue is successful in reaching people who have mild to moderate depression and anxiety, or those struggling with their mental wellbeing who would not necessarily recognise this as related to mental health, which reflects the organisation's aim to intervene early and provide low intensity supports. However, there is evidence that Beyond Blue reaches people experiencing all levels of distress, including those in significant distress, through the Support Service/ CMWSS (26% extremely distressed) and Forums (19% extremely distressed).

There is less evidence about Beyond Blue's reach into **diverse populations**. Stakeholders also had a perception that Beyond Blue is better at reaching the white middle class, and not as good at reaching people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and

linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ communities. People from these communities consistently face barriers in engaging with services and supports more broadly, and Beyond Blue has progressed several pieces of work to reduce these barriers in relation to its supports. The impact of this work and stakeholder perception is difficult to review in data, as there is less evidence about Beyond Blue's reach into priority populations, given the commitment to provide anonymity and allow people to make their own decisions about closure, and difficulty of collecting this data for some products and services. Beyond Blue's Support Service, CMWSS and Forums are reaching gender-diverse people broadly in proportion to population estimates. The Support Service and Forums are also reaching culturally diverse people broadly in proportion to the population. Beyond Blue is reaching a small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through its core products and services, and significantly more through supported services, such as The Way Back Support Service.

3.4 VALUE FOR MONEY

It is difficult to effectively assess the value for money provided by mental health services – given the myriad factors affecting outcomes and non-linearity of recovery – and even more so at the organisational-level.

Available data suggest Beyond Blue is making strategic decisions to provide products and services it is best placed to provide, and that are not better addressed by other organisations. Beyond Blue staff noted the importance of the Commonwealth Government, and state and territory governments' non-tied funding, which accounts for approximately one-quarter of its income. In their view, this funding enables Beyond Blue's core operations, is critical for its ongoing sustainability, and allows the organisation to respond to the changing mental health needs of Australians.

Beyond Blue has also sought diverse sources of funding to support sustainability and to best suit different purposes (e.g. philanthropy funding to develop new services). It has leveraged financial support from its corporate partners, and is able to supplement funding with its own reserves to deliver actions that would not otherwise be funded.

The limited granularity of data makes it difficult to make an evaluative judgement about whether Beyond Blue has efficiently managed the funds they spend. Beyond Blue's overheads are lower than the average overhead cost for non-for-profit (NFP) organisations in Australia, but as organisations classify overheads differently, it is difficult to make comparisons.

Cost per contact information is available for some services. The cost per contact for Beyond Blue's Support Service (funded through donations and philanthropy²⁹) increased over the strategy period. Staff indicated this is due to the transition to a new provider,³⁰ significant investment in transformation of the service, alignment to market costs for workforce, and

²⁹ With the exception of a time-limited period during the COVID-19 pandemic when some government funding was allocated to the Beyond Blue Support Service as part of the pandemic response and in recognition of the significantly increased demand.

³⁰ Beyond Blue's contract with its previous provider was due for retender.

reportedly longer average handling times. The average cost per contact across the three-year period (\$64) is difficult to compare to other services, particularly during this transition period. However, the Support Service offers accessibility, as it can be accessed at any time, through any channel, at no cost to the individual and anonymously if desired. The cost per user for Forums is minimal. The delivery of Be You has become more efficient over the three-year period because of its significant growth in reach. Other services, like NewAccess for Small Business Owners have also been independently determined to represent good value for money (cost benefit ratio of 1.14).

4. OPPORTUNITIES

The evaluation identified the following opportunities for Beyond Blue to consider:

REACH

- Increase the consistency of demographic data collection from service users to better understand who Beyond Blue is reaching and who they are not, while continuing to balance this with privacy concerns, ensuring it does not place any undue burden on service users.
- Continue to tailor approaches to reach particular cohorts, such as occurred for young people in the CMWSS.
- Continue to use partnerships with specialist organisations to best connect people from particular demographics and with particular conditions to support.
- Continue Big Blue Door reforms to support personalisation, connection and consistency of experience across Beyond Blue supports and connection to other supports.
- Consider further strategies to be more accessible to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

MONITORING DATA

- Work towards standardised satisfaction data to provide a clearer picture of satisfaction across different products and services, particularly for core products and services (noting the challenges in influencing data collection among commissioned providers).
- Increase the consistency of outcomes data collected across products and services in line with the outcomes identified in the new strategy, noting that not all may be relevant to each program. Increase reporting of outcomes in regular reporting to the Commonwealth Government.
- To strengthen evidence of policy outcomes, consider a more systematic quantitative approach to measuring policy influence of submissions (e.g. a relative score for how closely the outcome reflects Beyond Blue's submission).

EVALUATION

- Encourage evaluations to collect more consistent outcomes data to enable better synthesis of outcomes at the organisational level.
- Consider including value for money assessments in evaluation, where appropriate.

THE ECOSYSTEM AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Consider broader stakeholder communication when Beyond Blue decides to withdraw or shift its focus/ action from a particular area, so stakeholders understand the rationale.
- Consider how partnership / collaborator processes might be streamlined to ensure faster turnaround times and less administrative burden for partners or collaborators to enable more progress on products.

FINANCIAL DATA/ VALUE FOR MONEY

- Record more detail on how funding is combined from different services to enable a better understanding of how Beyond Blue aims to maximise value.
- Continue to enhance financial data to demonstrate value for money, including benchmarking cost per interaction over time (while ensuring outcomes are maintained), and options for assessing return on investment, cost effectiveness or cost-benefit, noting the challenges in putting a dollar value on outcomes in this context.