

## Beyond Blue response to the Independent Evaluation (2020-2023)

Beyond Blue is required to undergo an independent evaluation as part of our core funding contract with the Commonwealth Government. This is important for transparency and accountability. The fifth of these independent evaluations was conducted by ARTD Consultants for the 3-year period 2020-2023.

You can read ARTD's full and summary evaluation reports on our website:

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/research-projects>.

The evaluation **examined Beyond Blue as a whole**, from our community supports and services, to our advocacy, how we partner with others, and how we work with the community. It scrutinised how effectively we performed the roles in our previous strategic plan for the 3-year period, as well as our reach, impact, and value for money.

### Headline findings

**The evaluation reinforced that we're here for the community when they need us most.**

- Across each of our supports and services, we had a **sustained positive impact on the community's mental health**
- We were **flexible, adaptive, and responsive during turbulent times**: this positive impact was achieved at a time of unexpected and severe challenges – including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and a cost-of-living crisis.
- These challenges placed a heavy and cumulative burden on the mental health of the community, and we not only provided support and alleviated distress, but **responded with agility by providing supports and services tailored to help people navigate each of these challenges**.

ARTD also found that Beyond Blue is making an **important contribution to the broader mental health landscape**, from our **leadership on policy and advocacy** to our extensive support of **new areas of research**.

We are particularly proud of our efforts to **innovate, scale services, and advocate for effective community support** for people after a suicide attempt through our The Way Back Support Service. This helped influence all Australian governments to adopt and fund universal aftercare services.

### Beyond Blue welcomes ARTD's findings

ARTD also identified a series of opportunities to deepen our reach and impact. We accept and are committed to addressing all the areas for improvement identified, so we can keep contributing to all people in Australia achieving their best possible mental health.

Some of these opportunities are in our current workplan, and the rest will be incorporated into future workplans. The table below sets this out.

We will do this through our new strategy – [\*Strategy 2023+ Earlier. Easier. Together\*](#) – which picks up on many of the recommendations of ARTD. We will continue to be that big blue door to free, immediate and effective support, advice, and referral – from those who want to look after their mental health, to those in high distress and crisis.

- **Earlier**: Our role will sharpen to focus on prevention and earlier intervention, working with the community to improve mental health and make it easier for people to feel better earlier, get well and stay well.
- **Easier**: We will make it as easy as possible for people to find the right advice and support when they come to Beyond Blue, and to have a positive experience when they connect with us.

- Together: By being clearer about our role and what we offer, we will help answer community calls for a less confusing and fragmented mental health sector. Importantly, we will continue to grow our impact working together with others.

## Thank you

The evaluation highlighted the extraordinary efforts of a large and diverse network of community members who play a critical role in our work and impact. We thank each of these Speakers, Ambassadors, Blue Voices Lived Experience community members, Community Forums Champions, Volunteers, and other supporters.

Many individuals contributed to the evaluation. We sincerely thank:

- Everyone who participated in interviews, including community members, our corporate, community and sector partners and collaborators and government representatives.
- The members of the Independent Evaluation Advisory Committee, including community members, who provided expert advice to inform the evaluation, guided its direction, and reviewed the findings.
- Beyond Blue staff who supported ARTD and the Independent Evaluation Advisory Committee.

Finally, thanks to the ARTD team for their professional and careful work, and clear findings and recommendations.

February 2024

## Beyond Blue’s response to opportunities for improvement identified in our independent evaluation 2020-23

We accept and are committed to addressing the 15 opportunities for improvement recommended by ARTD (pages 115-116) so we can keep contributing to all people in Australia achieving their best possible mental health.

EVALUATION - IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES	BEYOND BLUE RESPONSE
<b>REACH</b>	
<p><b>1. 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.</b></p>	<p>We recognise how important it is to understand who accesses our supports and services. This helps us to support people earlier and provide more tailored support, but also to know which groups of people don’t use our support options.</p> <p>We are improving our demographic data collection and are currently updating the way we collect this data to ensure it is consistently recorded across all our services and business areas. We have developed <i>Demographic Data Standards</i> to help us achieve this.</p> <p>While it’s important for us to understand who we reach and to capture essential data, there is a balance to achieve here.</p> <p>Our goal is always to reduce barriers to seeking help.</p> <p>We deliberately design our supports and services so that we don’t ask people for detailed information about themselves. As an organisation that specialises in early support, advice and referral – and is often the first place people turn to when they are struggling with their mental health – we want this to not feel onerous or even more overwhelming for them.</p> <p>We also recognise that some community members prefer not to share their personal information whether it be for privacy reasons or because they want to focus solely on the issue that has led them to contact us.</p> <p>We will continue to prioritise respecting people’s preferences when it comes to sharing their personal information or demographic data.</p>

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	<p>We understand this means we won't always have a complete picture of the demographic characteristics of everyone who has engaged with us.</p>
<p><b>2. Continue to tailor approaches to reach particular cohorts, such as occurred for young people in the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service (CMWSS).</b></p> <p><i>Beyond Blue note: The Commonwealth-funded CMWSS was a national service established rapidly by Beyond Blue in 2020 to specifically provide accessible community-wide wellbeing and mental health advice and support during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided digital content, counselling, and referral pathways for everyone in Australia. As the pandemic affected particular population groups more than others, we targeted support options and partnered with a range of other organisations.</i></p>	<p>Beyond Blue takes a population health approach to our work, which means we aim to ensure our free supports and services are designed for all people in Australia. We recognise that some people are more likely to experience mental health challenges than others, as well as barriers to accessing the support they need when and where they need it.</p> <p>Rather than developing specific and tailored services targeted at particular groups, we have developed inclusion principles and an inclusion plan, that help us design services that are relevant to as many people as possible and which help us understand the challenges people face in accessing services. This also helps us to determine when more targeted or specialised options are necessary.</p> <p>As part of this, we recognise that other organisations are better placed than we are to reach specific groups. They may have different expertise (for example, in culture or demographics), closer relationships on the ground to particular communities, and have worked over many years to build local networks and trust. We have started to develop a network of partnerships which have helped more effectively connect specific groups with the supports we offer.</p> <p>We will continue to take this approach of partnering to extend our reach, to avoid duplication, and to recognise our organisational expertise and strengths and those of others. Working together with others is a major feature of our new <a href="#">Strategy 2023+</a>.</p> <p>Our ongoing community engagement and research also help us recognise and target groups who are more likely to experience poor mental health. This in turn informs all our communications, partnerships, and engagement activities.</p>
<p><b>3. Continue to use partnerships with specialist organisations to best connect people from particular demographics and with particular conditions to support.</b></p>	<p>Our goal is to support all people in Australia, adopting a population-level approach. We recognise the critical role of more specialist organisations who are dedicated to supporting particular community groups or particular conditions or experiences.</p>

EVALUATION - IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES	BEYOND BLUE RESPONSE
	<p>Partnering with these specialist organisations is an important part of our approach. It helps us connect earlier and more effectively with these groups to provide them with the best options for accessing the support they need, in line with our <a href="#">Strategy 2023+</a>. Our relationships with organisations like Lifeline, headspace, ReachOut, 13 YARN, Paralympics Australia, Gayaa Dhuwi and AMES Australia are examples of our commitment to this approach. We will continue to expand and deepen our relationships with specialist organisations.</p>
<p><b>4. Continue Big Blue Door reforms to support personalisation, connection and consistency of experience across Beyond Blue supports and connection to other supports.</b></p>	<p>Beyond Blue is committed to realising our Big Blue Door vision – to provide accessible, personalised, safe and connected mental health support for all people who engage with Beyond Blue. Put simply, as a well-known organisation that is often the first-place people turn to, we want to make it easier for people to access the supports and services they need, through the channel that most suits them.</p> <p>We continue to make significant investments towards achieving this vision, including through our Digital Evolution Program. This work will help improve the community’s experience when they engage with us, by utilising technology and insights to help recognise people’s needs and more efficiently and smoothly direct them to the support they need through a range of channels. We have already progressed towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>new Beyond Blue website</b> which will offer a better experience for people – now and as technology evolves</li> <li>• more <b>personalised content</b>, matched to a person’s needs and preferences, ensuring the right content is easily accessible to the people who may need it, in the moment they need it, and</li> <li>• improving our use of <b>data and insights</b> to continuously listen to people’s experiences and improve our products and services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Consider further strategies to be more accessible to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.</b></p>	<p>Beyond Blue is deeply committed to ensuring that our supports and services are seen as culturally safe and are accessible to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.</p> <p>We know we have more to do.</p> <p>Our focus on inclusion prompts us to consider the strengths of communities, but also acknowledges the impacts of trauma, racism and colonisation, and the ongoing impacts these challenges have on mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.</p>

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	<p>An example of this is our dedication to working alongside and learning from First Nations People and communities to support their social and emotional wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our <a href="#">Reconciliation Action Plan</a> outlines our ongoing commitment to building stronger connections, capabilities and cultural competence. For example, we have mandatory cultural competence training for all Beyond Blue staff. We also require that the staff of all our key service providers are appropriately trained in cultural competencies.</li> <li>• We have developed, with a panel of First Nation educators, a series of culturally responsive resources for <a href="#">Be You</a>, the national mental health and wellbeing initiative for learning communities in Australia. These have been designed for educators to invite genuine connection and deepen engagement with First Nations children, young people, families, and communities.</li> <li>• We are establishing a First Nations Advisory Group to provide ongoing advice to Beyond Blue, including sharing knowledge about community needs, designing what we do and how we do it, and providing feedback on our work.</li> <li>• We will strengthen our relationships with specialist organisations to maximise our reach to specific communities. We have been strengthening our working relationships with 13YARN and Gayaa Dhuwi to improve the way in which we can support First Nations Peoples and communities.</li> </ul> <p>We will continue to improve our accessibility in multicultural communities. We currently provide access to the Translating and Interpreting Service to support access to our free services. We also support and promote Mental Health Australia’s Embrace Mental Health program, a national platform focused on mental health and suicide prevention for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>We will also expand our focus on partnerships with multicultural communities, for example, through our emerging community partnership with AMES Australia who work directly in the community with people from diverse and migrant backgrounds to support them with language and employment skills.</p>

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<b>MONITORING DATA</b>	
<p><b>6. 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).</b></p>	<p>We recognise the importance of understanding how satisfied people are when they use our services so we can learn what works well and what we can do better.</p> <p>We report on satisfaction for many of our products and services using a net promoter score, but we are currently working to implement a consistent and best practice measure of people’s satisfaction across all our products and services. We will also work with those who we commission to deliver services on our behalf so that they measure satisfaction in the same way we do.</p> <p>Our new <a href="#">Strategy 2023+</a> aims to make it easier for people to access our supports and services and collecting and analysing this data consistently will help us achieve this.</p>
<p><b>7. 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.</b></p>	<p>Improving the consistency of our outcomes measurement is a key focus for Beyond Blue in our current workplan. Each of the five goals in <a href="#">Strategy 2023+</a> has a clearly defined set of identified outcomes. Some of these outcomes are relevant to more than one of our supports and services.</p> <p>We have a program of work to achieve this consistency of outcomes indicators across the organisation. This will allow us to gain a clearer understanding of our overall impact, as well as the impact of our individual services and business areas. It will also help us understand how and in what ways we can continuously improve the support options we offer the community.</p>
<p><b>8. Increase reporting of outcomes in regular reporting to the Commonwealth Government.</b></p>	<p>Wherever possible, we now include outcomes in government reports in addition to information about our reach and product and service uptake. We are also working with governments to develop product and service dashboards that offer timely, simple access to trends and service usage data.</p> <p>We will continue to provide the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare with quarterly service data to support mental health services activity monitoring.</p> <p>We will publish a report of our outcomes against our strategic goals annually, providing both Government funders and the broader community transparency over the difference we make for the community.</p>

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<p><b>9. 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).</b></p>	<p>Beyond Blue currently reviews where and how our submissions and recommendations may be influencing policy direction. We will adopt a more systematic approach in how we measure our policy influence and impact and will report on these outcomes in the annual outcomes report.</p>
<p><b>EVALUATION</b></p>	
<p><b>10. Encourage evaluations to collect more consistent outcomes data to enable better synthesis of outcomes at the organisational level.</b></p>	<p>We will improve the consistency of outcomes data in future evaluations to help present a clearer picture of the impact we’re making and the opportunities we have to improve our services and supports.</p> <p>Beyond Blue will refresh our evaluation procedures, build evaluative capabilities across the organisation, and ensure that all of our major programs and services have strong evaluation foundations, including a consistent approach to developing program logic models.</p>
<p><b>11. Consider including value for money assessments in evaluation, where appropriate.</b></p>	<p>Beyond Blue is committed to understanding the value for money our services offer the community in line with our strategic goal to be a good investment, noting the challenges identified by ARTD in its report. We will include value for money assessments as a key component of future evaluations, where appropriate. We will also work with Government and sector organisations to identify contemporary approaches to value for money assessment.</p>
<p><b>THE ECOSYSTEM AND PARTNERSHIPS</b></p>	
<p><b>12. Consider broader stakeholder communication when Beyond Blue decides to withdraw or shift its focus/ action from a particular area, so stakeholders understand the rationale.</b></p>	<p>The evaluation noted Beyond Blue’s focus on reducing duplication and focussing on strategic decisions to provide products and services we are best placed to provide, and that are not better addressed by other organisations.</p> <p>These principles mean that from time to time we make decisions about where we can make the most significant contribution. These are sometimes difficult choices, but other times clearly necessary because of changes in community needs, circumstances or funding, or that other organisations are better placed than us to focus in this area. Other times it is because we have achieved what we set out to do and there is another gap that the evidence shows we should shift resources or attention to.</p>



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	<p>We place high importance on keeping our partners informed of our decisions and the reasons underpinning them. While we develop communications plans to share major program and organisational changes with relevant partners and stakeholders, this feedback highlights an opportunity to improve our communications in relation to any shifts in focus.</p> <p>An example during the evaluation period is our decision to change our role in suicide prevention once we handed over to governments our dedicated suicide prevention aftercare services – The Way Back Support Service – in June 2023 after almost 10 years of trialling, evaluating and then scaling the service. We rolled out a communications plan with the aim of explaining in a timely and transparent way why this was happening and where we were heading next. From early on, we advised our partners and stakeholders that our ultimate aim was to gather data and evidence that eventually convinced governments that everyone must receive compassionate, evidence-based community support after a suicide attempt. The decision from governments to commit to supporting suicide aftercare in the current mental health and suicide prevention national agreement meant that we achieved our service innovation and advocacy goals, and enabled us to safely handover the program and intellectual property to others. Our decision to do so and the rationale for it, along with our new strategic direction to focus on intervening earlier, was extensively and systematically communicated with all our stakeholders, but we appreciate that this may not have reached a broader stakeholder group.</p>
<p><b>13. 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.</b></p>	<p>We want our partners and collaborators have the best possible experience of working with us.</p> <p>Taking this feedback, we will streamline our processes and turnaround times. We recognise that doing so will lead to improvements in how efficiently we can achieve the collective aims of our partnerships to deliver benefit to the community.</p> <p>We will also continue to seek ongoing feedback from our partners and collaborators, both directly and via our annual partner survey.</p>
FINANCIAL DATA/ VALUE FOR MONEY	
<p><b>14. Record more detail on how funding is combined from different services to enable a better understanding of how Beyond Blue aims to maximise value.</b></p>	<p>Beyond Blue is grateful for the funding we receive from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, corporate and philanthropic partners, and the community. This co-contribution model allows Beyond Blue to leverage different funding sources to deliver programs and activities that would not otherwise be possible.</p>

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	<p>We are committed to ensuring that the funding we receive from different sources is utilised in the most efficient way, to reach as many people who require our supports as possible. In our regular government and public reporting, we will provide greater clarity on how funding is combined across different services.</p>
<p><b>15. 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.</b></p>	<p>A strong feature of our <a href="#">Strategy 2023+</a> is to demonstrate our impact and be considered a good investment.</p> <p>We recognise that enhancing the financial data we capture will assist us to demonstrate this value and to continuously improve our services to increase the value we offer. We are currently developing systems to capture the necessary data to perform these analyses.</p>