

Beyond Blue submission, on behalf of Be You, to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Schools Reform Agreement

16 June 2022

Key points

- Beyond Blue, on behalf of Be You, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Schools Reform Agreement.
- Beyond Blue proudly delivers Be You, in collaboration with service delivery partners Early Childhood Australia and headspace. Be You is the national mental health in education initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health.
- Embedding children and young people's wellbeing in key accountability mechanisms across the education system will contribute to ensuring that student wellbeing is a sustained priority over the long term.
- Be You was pleased that work was undertaken on student wellbeing measures as part of the current National Schools Reform Agreement's National Policy Initiatives.¹ Our submission focuses on this aspect of the National Policy Initiatives and related recommendations for the National Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia.

Recommendations

1. Nationally consistent wellbeing outcomes measures are included in the National Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia as part of the next National Schools Reform Agreement
2. Mapping of measures and methods between the Preschool Reform Agreement outcomes work (in progress) and those in the next National Schools Reform Agreement
3. The National Policy Initiatives in the next National Schools Reform Agreement include a continued focus on wellbeing outcomes measures to ensure continuous improvement

Background

- Beyond Blue's vision is that every Australian has the best mental health possible. For children and young people, we know that education settings are a critical site where mental health and wellbeing can be supported to help achieve this vision.
- Be You supports early learning services and schools to develop a positive, inclusive and resilient learning community where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health. The initiative:

¹ Council of Australian Governments (2018) National School Reform Agreement, Part 3 C (iii) "Improving national data quality national policy initiative", p. 9.

- o equips educators to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people from birth to 18 years, providing an end-to-end approach for early learning services, primary schools, and secondary schools across Australia;
- o promotes mental health literacy and wellbeing, and works to prevent mental health issues and suicide through early intervention and critical incident response and support;
- o supports educators' wellbeing and equips them with the knowledge and skills to support their students' mental health and embed social and emotional learning into their pedagogy; and has significant reach. In only three and half years, over two-thirds of all Australian schools and one-third of early learning services have registered as Be You Learning Communities. In addition, over 150,000 educators and people studying education have signed up to Be You.

Further detail on Beyond Blue's recommendations

1. Wellbeing outcomes measures are included in the National Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia as part of the next National Schools Reform Agreement

- There is a need for a nationally consistent and coordinated approach to collecting and reporting wellbeing outcomes measures in the National Schools Reform Agreement.
- This will enable schools and the education sector to better understand and meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people across Australia.

Good mental health and wellbeing are integral to academic learning and lifelong outcomes

- Mental health issues that emerge during these formative years can have a lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of the individual and on the lives of those around them.²
- Students with persistent emotional or behavioural problems in Year 3, fall a year behind their peers in numeracy between years 3 and 7, with similar, although smaller trends, in reading.³ This education gap can persist or worsen across a child's education.
- Students with good mental health are more motivated learners, have fewer behavioural problems and show greater commitment to their schoolwork.⁴
- Good mental health in childhood also provides a solid foundation for managing the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood.

Nationally consistent wellbeing outcome measures

- Having nationally consistent wellbeing outcome measures will enable the education and mental health sectors to better support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in a strategic way and enable more effective early intervention.
- As the Productivity Commission is aware, there are numerous wellbeing measures in place across jurisdictions, reflecting the fact that states and territories understand the importance of supporting the wellbeing of children and young people in education settings.⁵
- Many of the existing measures are well-regarded and evidence-based. Beyond Blue recommends developing a nationally consistent approach to collecting and reporting on wellbeing outcome measures by utilising these existing resources to reduce unnecessary duplication of work.
- Advice about the most appropriate measures to include and effective ways of implementing the collection and analysis of these measures should be guided by experts in wellbeing outcomes. This approach could consider the specific contexts of each jurisdiction while still ensuring national consistency.
- Introducing nationally consistent wellbeing outcome measures is supported by:

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australia's Health 2016. Accessed at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/9844cefb-7745-4dd8-9ee2-f4d1c3d6a727/19787-AH16.pdf.aspx> [October 2018]

³ The Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (2018). *Student wellbeing, engagement and learning across the middle years*. Australian Government Department of Education and Training: Canberra.

⁴ Nelson, R. et al. (2004). Academic achievement of K–12 students with emotional and behavioural disorders. *Exceptional Children*, 71(1), pp. 59–73.

⁵ Productivity Commission (2020). *Mental Health*, Report no. 95: Canberra, pp. 239–242; Australian Institute for Teaching and Learning (March 2022). *Spotlight: Wellbeing in Australian Schools*. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/wellbeing-in-australian-schools>.

- The final report of the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Mental Health which recommended that wellbeing measures be introduced to the National Schools Reform Agreement.⁶
- The 2022 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention National Agreement that commits to wellbeing measures being included in the National Schools Reform Agreement.⁷
- The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy which highlighted the need for increased coordination and monitoring of student wellbeing outcomes and recommended the establishment of a national minimum data set with annual collection conducted via schools.⁸

Implementation support for educators

- Education departments, regions, schools and educators will need to be supported to implement any additional reporting that is required as part of this recommendation if it is adopted.
- Be You’s research clearly demonstrates that educators already have limited time and resources. The issue of educators having sufficient time and resources to support students’ wellbeing has been repeatedly raised as key to enabling a mentally healthy education system. Market research undertaken on behalf of Be You correlates with this analysis. It found that “the most prominent ‘barrier’ for supporting the mental health of learners was time constraints, which was mentioned by 60% of educators.”⁹
- Be You research also clearly demonstrates that time constraints also have a significant impact on educators’ wellbeing.¹⁰ In turn, educators’ wellbeing impacted on the wellbeing of children and young people in their learning communities.¹¹
- Any additional reporting obligations must be offset by additional resourcing and professional development to support educators.

2. Mapping of measures and methods between the Preschool Reform Agreement outcomes work (in progress) and those in the next National Schools Reform Agreement

- Be You welcomes the focus of the current Preschool Reform Funding Agreement (2022-2025) on reforms aimed at improving the quality and transparency of preschool data available nationally and the development of a new Preschool Performance Framework.
- This includes work being developed with advice from an Expert Advisory Group (EAG), including preschool outcomes measures and it is anticipated that these measures will have a strong wellbeing focus.
- Be You recommends that work be undertaken to ensure the approach currently being developed as part of the Preschool Reform Funding Agreement is compatible with the approach taken to wellbeing outcomes measures in the next National Schools Reform Agreement.
- Doing so will recognise the importance of transitions between early childhood education and care and school settings.
- These transitions are critical for children’s wellbeing and aligning reforms across these settings will assist in providing greater insight into how best to support wellbeing and where to focus resources.

⁶ Productivity Commission (2020). *Mental Health*, Report no. 95: Canberra, Action 5.3, p. 64.

⁷ National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention National Agreement (2022). Schedule A: Improving Mental Health and Preventing Suicide Across Systems, p. A-3.

⁸ Australian Government (2021). *The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*: Canberra, Action 4.1.c, p. 87.

⁹ IPSOS (2020). *Be You Educator Research 2020*. Report of Findings Prepared for Beyond Blue, pp.24-25.

¹⁰ Reupert, A., Patrick, P., Berger, E., Morris, Z., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., & Hine, R. (2021). *Educator care: Moving beyond self-care*. Report produced for Beyond Blue.

¹¹ Reupert, A., Patrick, P., Berger, E., Morris, Z., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., & Hine, R. (2021). *Educator care: Moving beyond self-care*. Report produced for Beyond Blue.

3. The National Policy Initiatives in the next National Schools Reform Agreement include a continued focus on wellbeing outcomes measures to insure continuous improvement

- Work has been undertaken under the current National Schools Reform Agreement in this area, particularly by the ACT Education Directorate under National Policy Initiatives (Part 3 C (iii)) “Improving national data quality national policy initiative”).¹²
- If the work undertaken by the ACT Education Directorate under the current National Policy Initiatives has not concluded it is important to ensure that it is completed as part of the next agreement.
- Further, maintaining focus on wellbeing outcomes measures in the National Policy Initiatives of the next Agreement will be a critical way to support implementation if our first and second recommendations are adopted. Doing so will also ensure continuous improvement into future Agreements.

¹² Department of Education Skills and Employment (2021). *Improving National Data Quality: Fact Sheet*: Canberra.