

# Understanding mental health and wellbeing

*Being mentally healthy and living well is important to every single one of us – whether we are living with a mental illness or not.*

Defining mental health

Mental health is a positive concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Having good mental health, or being mentally healthy, is more than just the absence of illness, rather it's a state of overall wellbeing.

The concept is influenced by culture, but it generally relates to:

- Enjoyment of life
- Having the ability to cope with and 'bounce back' from stress and sadness
- Being able to set and fulfil goals
- Having the capability to build and maintain relationships with others.

The term 'social and emotional wellbeing' is preferred by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it reflects a more holistic view of health. It is also used by some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who may have differing concepts of mental health and mental illness.

Influences on mental health and wellbeing

Mental health is influenced by several biological, psychological, social and environmental factors which interact in complex ways. These include:

- Structural factors such as safe living environments, employment, education, freedom from discrimination and violence, and access to economic resources
- Community factors such as a positive sense of belonging, community connectedness, activities to highlight and embrace diversity, social support, and participation in society
- Individual factors such as the ability to manage thoughts and cope with stressors and having communication and social skills to support connection with others.

### Tips for mental health and wellbeing

We all know that to keep a car going, we have to fill it with petrol, check the oil and water regularly and give the tires some air. To see a bank balance grow, we need to make steady deposits. But how often do we take the time to reflect on whether we are giving ourselves what we need to flourish and live well?

It can be so easy for us to take our mental health for granted; to prioritise other things; to put it off until next week. It can also seem too big and too hard. But it's not. There are some things everyone can do. The following are some tips to get you started

1. Get enough sleep and rest. Sleep affects our physical and mental health, but can be the first thing we trade in when we get busy or stressed
2. Take time out for things you enjoy. Balance in life is important, so taking time out for things you enjoy can make a difference to how you think and feel
3. Be active and eat well. Our physical and mental health is closely linked, so adding exercise and nutritious food every day can make us feel better
4. Nurture relationships and connect with others. Our connection to others is what builds us up and keeps us strong

5. Learn to manage stress. If you have trouble winding down or managing thoughts you may find relaxation, yoga or writing your feelings down helpful
6. Get involved and join in. Being part of a group with common interests provides a sense of belonging so find out about sporting, music, volunteer or community groups locally
7. Build your confidence. Learning improves your mental fitness and taking on a new challenge can build confidence and give you a sense of achievement
8. Be comfortable in your own skin. Everyone is unique and should be celebrated. Know who you are and what makes you happy.
9. Set realistic goals and deal with tasks one at a time. It is good to be specific when you set a goal to help keep you on track
10. Reach out for help when you need it. Everyone needs support from time to time. Talking to a family member, a friend, your doctor or one of the many services available can make all the difference.

Mental health and wellbeing is important to individuals, families, schools, workplaces and communities. There is a role for all of us to play.