

*Mental health is
everyone's business*

The Melbourne Children's Campus Mental Health Strategy 2021-2026

Executive Summary Report
April 2026



**Melbourne
Children's**
A world leader
in child and
adolescent health



Supported by The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation

Acknowledgements

At the Melbourne Children's Campus Mental Health Strategy, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, gather and work. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We acknowledge all people with a lived and living experience of mental health challenges and recovery. At the campus, we particularly acknowledge children, young people, families, and staff.

We recognise their vital contribution and value the courage of those who share this unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for the campus, sector, and all people of lived and living experience.

We would like to give thanks to our funders, The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, Good Friday Appeal, donors, and the Federal Government, for their support of the Strategy.

Cover artwork: "Abstract" by Alison Norman, Lived Experience Advisor.

Alison said, "My artwork showcases a variety of shapes, colours and textures - just as mental health experiences provide us with highs and lows. This represents the many intricacies and variables in each journey. I have painted with a positive and uplifting colour palette, and hope that viewers may see positivity too".

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Mental health is everyone's business

Our vision

All infants, children, young people, and their families have access to high-quality, equitable, consistent and preventative mental health care where and when they need it to achieve sustained, optimised developmental, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Our purpose

The Melbourne Children's Campus Mental Health Strategy (Strategy) 2021-2026 was developed to address the complex mental health needs of children, young people, and their families within paediatric healthcare.

Bringing together the expertise of people with lived experience, clinicians, researchers, educators, and paediatric leaders, the Strategy aimed to strengthen gaps in evidence-based care, research, and education in mental health among children and young people across the Melbourne Children's Campus.

The Melbourne Children's Campus

The Melbourne Children's Campus (campus) joins together The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH), Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), the University of Melbourne Department of Paediatrics and The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation.

Its purpose is to collaborate in advancing child and adolescent health through prevention, early intervention and health promotion, together with high-quality clinical care, outstanding research, and comprehensive education and training.

Why focus on mental health?

Each year, the RCH treats thousands of children and young people with established mental health conditions and an even greater number of children at risk of mental health problems alongside their physical health concerns or disabilities.

In recent years, mental health presentations to the RCH Emergency Department have surged by 400 per cent. This growing demand, along with the findings from the 2020 Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, demanded a coordinated, campus-wide approach to mental health.

One in seven

children aged 4-17 years meet the criteria for a mental health disorder.



Half

of adult mental health problems begin in childhood.



60%

of children with chronic physical illness experience significant mental health symptoms.



Only 30%

of parents and carers are confident they would recognise mental health symptoms in their child



A strategic approach to mental health

The Strategy targeted five key areas:



Family Centred Care

Identify and respond to family wellbeing by implementing a Family Wellbeing Model of Care.



Trauma-Informed Preventative Care

Prevent trauma by creating an organisation-wide trauma-informed culture and approach.



Consistent Quality Care

Develop clinical practice guidelines and family resources for common mental health conditions.



Education

Embed Strategy outcomes into workforce education and training.



Research

Integrate mental health research across campus.

These key areas were supported by seven enablers:

- Governance
- Lived experience engagement
- Implementation
- Communications
- Advocacy
- Mental Health Central website
- The RCH Electronic Medical Record

What we set out to achieve

For campus partners

- Equip the campus as a leader in **evidence-based paediatric mental health** research, workforce education, care, and advocacy.
- Strengthen **collaboration** across campus to encourage the integration of mental health initiatives and **reduce fragmentation**.
- Enable meaningful, best practice engagement of **people with lived experience** across the Strategy - **"nothing about us, without us"**.

For children, young people, and their families

- Enable **consistent quality child and family centred care** where and when it's needed, inclusive of parents, carers, and siblings.
- Advocate for prevention and the **integration of physical and mental health care** as part of usual care.
- Develop **evidence-based resources** to build mental health literacy and support for families.

For campus staff

- Identify strengths and address gaps in **consistent mental health care** and clinical guidance.
- Develop a shared understanding of **trauma-informed care** with a focus on preventing trauma and re-traumatisation for children, young people, families, and staff.
- Develop **evidence-based mental health resources**, clinical guidelines and education to upskill the workforce.
- Acknowledge **staff wellbeing** and the impact of providing mental health care to children and young people.

What we achieved

Campus-wide

Over 210 people

from across campus were actively involved in
Strategy development and implementation

25,000+ visits

to Mental Health
Central website

10,000+

engagements with
digital resources

Mental health advocacy:

- published the **Advocacy Toolkit**
- four **government review submissions**
- released a **policy summary**
- **child and adolescent mental health (CAMH)** policy review, publication, and conference poster

Mental health research

5 Strategy research projects:

- 5 conference posters
- 6 publications

The Strategy also funded 9 campus research projects:

- Half secured external grants totalling **\$2.1M**
- 12 publications



**Conversation
with the
experts**

Workforce education

80+ education resources

including clinical educator facilitation
resources

700+ staff enrolled

in our education programs

6 Grand Rounds

attracting over 1,000 attendees

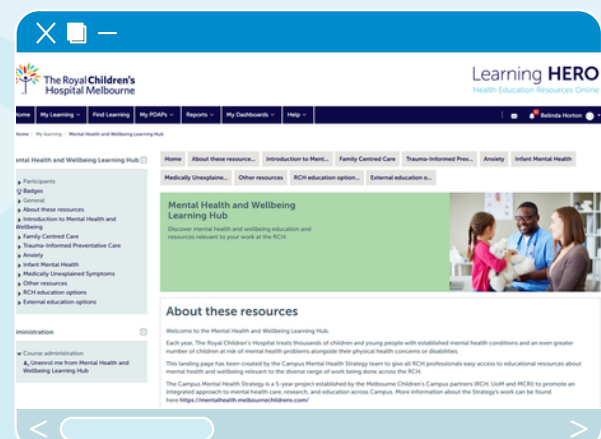
6 podcasts

with the Education Hub

6 eLearn programs

on RCH LearningHERO

Mental Health and Wellbeing Learning Hub



Mental health care

Australian first Evidence-based Clinical Practice Guidelines

 Anxiety in Children and Young People

 Suicide and Non-Suicidal Self-Injury in Children and Adolescents

RACGP-endorsed (Anxiety) and approved (Suicide). Adapted to international platforms!

RCH guidelines

Clinical Practice Guidelines:

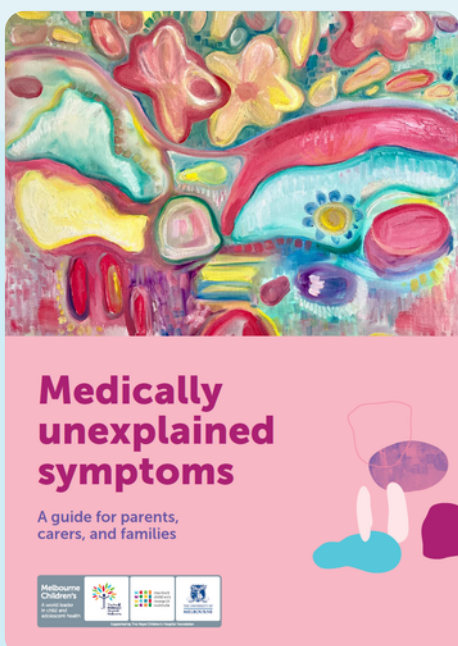
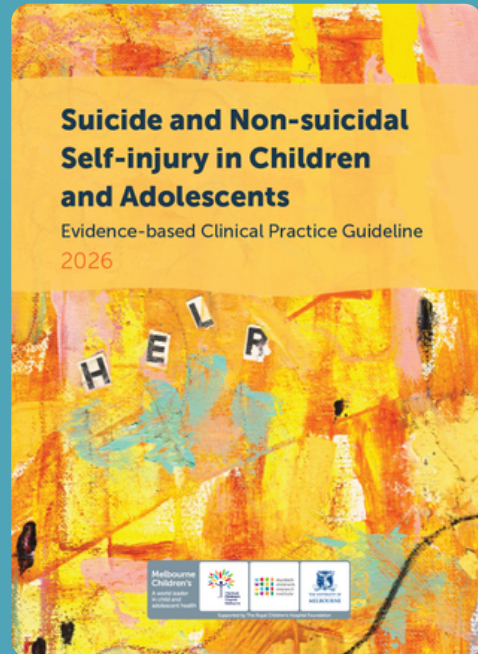
- Anxiety: identification and management
- Medically Unexplained Symptoms

Nursing practice guideline:

- Behaviour Support Profile

Implemented approaches

- 400+ staff trained in foundational Trauma-Informed Preventative Care
- Supporting parents, carers, and siblings with the Family Wellbeing Model of Care
- Evaluation and optimisation of the Behaviour Support Profile with increased use
- Medically Unexplained Symptoms suite of clinical and family resources



Mental health literacy

Kids Health Info Factsheets:

- Somatising and medically unexplained symptoms
- Somatic symptom and related disorders (SSRD)
- Paediatric trauma

Teen Health Info Factsheets:

- Medically Unexplained Symptoms

Family guides:

- Childhood anxiety
- Medically unexplained symptoms
- Wellbeing supports resource



Lived experience engagement

Our Lived Experience Advisor Network provided the Strategy and the campus with access to over 1,200 people of diverse ages (over 15 years) and backgrounds who identified as having lived and living experiences of mental health concerns and recovery as patients and carers.

Over 1,200 Lived Experience Advisors (LEAs) in our LEA Network

80+
LEAS

engaged in over

840

Strategy and campus
activities

\$100,000+

in LEA remuneration
over 4 years

**Rights and
responsibilities**
resource developed
by LEAs

88%

LEAs were
consumers

47%

LEAs were **carers**

39%

LEAs were **both**

LEA involvement by key area

24.6%

in **Family Centre Care**

22.8%

in **Trauma-informed
Preventative Care**

20.5%

in **Consistent Quality
Care**

17.5%

in **Education**

To LEAs...

“

*Helping us to shift practice and
culture around mental health and
making it harder for old habits to
pass as 'good enough'.*

- RCH clinician

“

*Sharing your wisdom with real
vulnerability and bringing
expertise that could not be
learnt from documents alone.*

- RCH clinician



Children's Mental Health Gallery Artbook

We're dedicated to amplifying and celebrating lived and living experiences of mental health challenges and recovery.

The book brings together 100 artworks and stories about mental health created by LEAs, including children, young people, and their loved ones with lived and living experiences.

Our impacts

For the Melbourne Children's Campus

- Leadership and innovation in mental health
- Collaboration across campus - tested campus processes
- Reduced fragmentation of mental health
- Lived experience engagement

For children, young people, and families

- Promotion of child and family centred care
- Family Wellbeing Model of Care for parents, carers, and siblings
- Prevention-focused and trauma-informed tools and education for staff
- Integrated physical and mental health care
- Mental health literacy resources

Campus staff

- Visibility and destigmatisation of mental health
- Filled gaps in evidence-based care and clinical guidance
- Shared understanding of trauma-informed preventative care
- Skill and knowledge development with evidence-based education programs
- Prioritised staff wellbeing and experiences

External

- National and international visibility of evidence-based Clinical Practice Guidelines
- Advocacy-led submissions to child wellbeing review processes - Royal Commission, Productivity Commission review, Parliamentary enquiries
- 6 conference posters promoting Strategy findings

To LEAs...

“

Many have experienced working with LEAs for the first time, and it showed that co-design can happen and it works.

- staff member

“

Your valuable expertise helped us create and improve our care, because without you we only have half the picture.

- staff member



Findings and insights

Enablers

Facilitation:

- 5 years of funding
- campus advocacy
- post-COVID focus on mental health

Existing strengths:

- building on great practice
- passionate staff from a range of programs across the campus
- broad expertise

Lived experience engagement:

- Lived Experience Advisor Network

Dedicated resources:

- skilled multidisciplinary Strategy team
- in-kind Steering Committee representing different areas of the campus
- campus champions
- campus in-kind supports

Challenges

Environment:

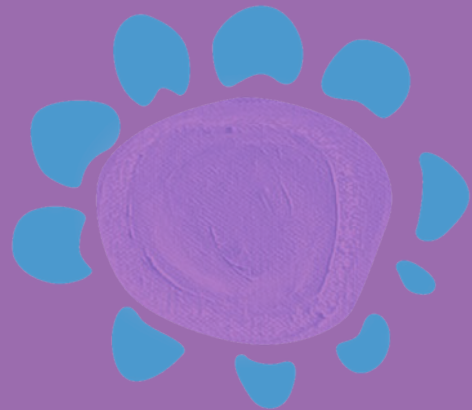
- culture change across the campus was slow
- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- competing priorities across campus

Campus:

- partners have their own processes, systems, and infrastructure, which led to duplication and inefficiency
- no single partner was responsible for Strategy governance

Workforce:

- lack of confidence and skills in mental health and care pathways
- mental health was seen as out of scope for many staff - mental health not seen as "my business"
- existing high demands on staff and turnover, reducing capacity to engage in Strategy initiatives
- communicating across campus channels was difficult



Steering Committee

The Strategy was overseen by our Steering Committee, made up of senior leaders from the partner organisations with reporting to the executives of those organisations and the Campus Council.

It was relatively consistent in membership and focus since February 2020 which was crucial to ensuring the sustained governance of the scope and direction of the Strategy implementation and campus-wide advocacy for mental health.

Strategy Implementation Team

The team consisted of over 20 people for the majority of the Strategy. Most were employed part-time by the three campus partner organisations - RCH, MCRI and University of Melbourne. This equated to 33 people over the 5 years, with the birth of 5 babies!

The Program Director and Strategy Leadership Group led implementation with oversight of the budget, reporting, monitoring milestones, and managing risks.

Conclusion

The Strategy was a beginning.

There remains significant work to build upon the integration of Strategy outputs to inform future planning, sustainability, and growth, making mental health everyone's business.

We achieved the:

- **successful delivery** of the Strategy within timelines and under budget
- completion of the majority of deliverables with recommendations for outputs to live on in business-as-usual
- evaluation of Strategy outputs demonstrating immediate impact and scalability

What's **next** for the campus?

The next steps for integrated mental health research, education and care across the campus require continued leadership and investment in:

- the development of a strategic vision for campus-wide advocacy and leadership
- scaling, increasing access to, and encouraging use of Strategy outputs and resources within teams and programs
- recognition of mental health and physical health as equally important and promoted within business-as-usual practice
- mental health prevention and early identification

We also recommend:

- embedding co-design with Lived Experience Advisors in all research
- evaluation of Strategy education packages
- EMR and patient portal integration of the Behaviour Support Profile and Family Wellbeing Model of Care
- universal approach to trauma-informed preventative care and culture
- updating the evidence-based clinical practice guidelines within life span





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