

Beyond Blue submission in response to the draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

1 December 2022

Beyond Blue recommends:

That the mental health and wellbeing of teachers is recognised as a critical pillar of workforce attraction, development and retention in the Action Plan and with the design of its activities, specifically:

1. The 'Strengthening Initial Teacher Education' focus area includes embedding high quality wellbeing curriculum in all initial teacher education in the remit of Action 10.
2. The 'Maximising Time to Teach' focus area includes implementation support for mental health and wellbeing initiatives in schools through:
 - a) Funding designated wellbeing support and integration roles in schools within Action 14; and
 - b) As part of Action 18, non-teaching staff and teaching assistant roles have time dedicated in their workload to enable teachers and school leaders to implement evidence-based and effective mental health and wellbeing initiatives such as Be You.
3. The 'Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession' focus area prioritises paid time to participate in mental health and wellbeing professional development as part of Action 24.

Introduction

- Beyond Blue welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. This submission draws on Beyond Blue's experience in designing, delivering and evaluating Be You www.beyou.edu.au, the Commonwealth's national mental health in education initiative. We have consulted with the Be You delivery partners, Early Childhood Australia and headspace, to inform this submission. This has included capturing insights from Be You consultants (employed by headspace) who work directly with teachers and school leaders across the country.
- Our recommendations focus on how the National Teacher Action Plan can better support the profession, thereby helping to build a mentally healthy education system and positive social and emotional learning outcomes.
- Teachers, schools and students face multiple challenges that impact wellbeing, including:
 - High workloads that are only increasing.¹ Teachers report workload, work-life balance and the impact of their work on their wellbeing as the main reason they would consider leaving the profession.²

¹ AITSL. (2021). *Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report*, Melbourne.

² AITSL. (2021). *Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report*, Melbourne.

- Teachers not adequately equipped to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of their students.³ Teachers understand this is a core part of their role.⁴ However, they lack the confidence and time to effectively support their students.⁵
- Children and young people are concerned about the impact of their mental health on their ability to achieve their educational goals.⁶ They want their schools to be able to support their mental health and wellbeing.⁷
- Be You is helping to address many of these issues through providing:
 - An evidence-based framework to implement a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing;
 - Accredited professional learning to student teachers, experienced teachers and school leaders;
 - Tools and resources to support teachers' wellbeing both individually and as a whole-school approach; and
 - On the ground, tailored support for schools from Be You consultants.

Recommendation 1: The 'Strengthening Initial Teacher Education' focus area include embedding high quality wellbeing curriculum in all initial teacher education in the remit of Action 10

Rationale:

- The Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry found a lack of material that focused on social and emotional learning and mental health in initial teacher education (ITE).⁸ While there has been significant work on improving ITE since the publication of the Productivity Commission's report there is still a need for graduate and early career teachers to have formal training embedded in their studies, so they are equipped to manage the mental health needs of their students.
- The Productivity Commission highlighted that to better support the mental health and wellbeing of students and improve wellbeing outcomes, all parts of the education system need to be working together. Improving the consistency of high-quality wellbeing curriculum in ITE is a key part of the system change that needs to occur.⁹
- Embedding wellbeing curriculum in all pre-service education and training will help ensure pre-service educators start their education career with greater confidence to embed social and emotional learning

³ Anderson, M., Werner-Seidler, A., King, C., Gayed, A., Harvey, S. B., & O'Dea, B. (2019). Mental health training programs for secondary school teachers: A systematic review. *School Mental Health*, 11(3), 489–508.

⁴ Quantum Market Research (2022). *Be You National Mental Health in Education: Research Report*. Melbourne: Quantum Market Research

⁵ Quantum Market Research (2022). *Be You National Mental Health in Education: Research Report*. Melbourne: Quantum Market Research

⁶ Tiller, E., Greenland, N., Christie, R., Kos, A., Brennan, N., & Di Nicola, K. (2021). Youth Survey Report 2021. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia.

⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2022). 'Mental health shapes my life': COVID-19 & kids' wellbeing.

⁸ Productivity Commission 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra, p. 194. The importance of including mental health and wellbeing curriculum in ITE will be especially pertinent if student wellbeing outcomes are included in the next National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA), as recommended by the interim report from the Productivity Commission's review of the current NSRA: Productivity Commission. (2022). *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*, Interim Report, Canberra, September The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health noted the challenge of inconsistent approaches to teacher pre-service training and professional development in mental health and wellbeing: "Governments should update the National School Reform Agreement to include student wellbeing as an outcome for the education system. This would include clear, measurable wellbeing targets. All parts of the education system would be expected to work towards achieving these targets. (Action 5.3): To implement this, Governments should develop guidelines for initial teacher education and professional development programs, to incorporate social and emotional development and mental health. State and Territory teacher regulatory authorities should use the guidelines to accredit providers. (Actions 5.3, 5.4)".

⁹ Productivity Commission 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra, p. 194.

in their pedagogy, deliver mental health and wellbeing support to students and have the skills to contribute to the implementation of a whole-school approach. This will also contribute to educator wellbeing in the long term by helping build a more resilient and empowered future workforce, who are better prepared to effectively meet the needs of students with more complex needs and respond to critical incidents.

- The recent appointment of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (the Panel) and its focus implementing the recommendations from the *Next Steps* report¹⁰ and ensuring that graduates are prepared for the classroom, as outlined in Action 10, is welcome. A critical part of equipping graduates is to ensure they can confidently and effectively deliver mental health and wellbeing support to students and this should be explicitly included in the remit of the Panel's work.
- Be You can support any recommendations made by the Panel to ensure that high quality wellbeing curriculum is consistently included in all ITE. Be You is exploring how to adapt existing material for the higher education sector and ITE. This draws on pilot work with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, which found there is a significant opportunity for Be You content to be adapted to the sector to support trainers and students.¹¹ Existing Be You materials have been trialled with pre-service teachers and early childhood educators, to determine how to best tailor content to meet the specific needs of these cohorts.

Recommendation 2: The 'Maximising Time to Teach' focus area include implementation support for mental health and wellbeing initiatives in schools through:

- Funding designated wellbeing support and integration roles in schools within Action 14**
- As part of Action 18, non-teaching staff and teaching assistant roles have time dedicated in their workload to enable teachers and school leaders to implement mental health and wellbeing initiatives such as Be You**

Rationale:

- Beyond Blue welcomes the focus in the draft Action Plan on addressing teacher workloads. There are multiple contributors to the increase in teacher workload, including new demands due to expectations that schools, school leaders and teachers play a large role in supporting children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing. Data demonstrates that children and young people experience significant challenges to their mental health and wellbeing, and in recent times, their mental health is further declining.¹²
- Even for those not directly involved in delivering wellbeing programs, teachers need to be equipped with potentially new skills within the scope of their role. For example, being able to identify and respond to mental health needs, know the right referral pathways and services and supports available, and have the time to implement these skills to provide support to students. Teachers need to manage these responsibilities with other aspects of their workload such as curriculum planning, classroom delivery, providing feedback and administrative and reporting requirements.
- 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.¹³ This was demonstrated in

¹⁰ Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2021). *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review*: Canberra.

¹¹ ACER, *Be You for VET: Final Report prepared for Beyond Blue*, unpublished, p. 28.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven De Haan K, Sawyer M, Ainley J, Zubrick SR. (2015). *The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Canberra: Department of Health.

¹³ Productivity Commission 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra, State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, February 2021, The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Canberra, 2021.

the Mental Health in Education Survey undertaken on behalf of Be You that found 60% of educators felt time constraints was the most prominent 'barrier' for supporting the mental health of learners.¹⁴ A Be You project looking at Educator Wellbeing also found time constraints significantly impact educators' wellbeing.¹⁵ In turn, educators' wellbeing impacted the wellbeing of children and young people in their learning communities.¹⁶

- Some jurisdictions have implemented some or part of Beyond Blue's recommendation to provide more support to implement Be You and mental health and wellbeing support. For example, the Victorian Schools Mental Health Fund rollout has commenced and Be You has been listed on the Schools Mental Health menu as a tier 1 program.¹⁷ However, Beyond Blue argues that *all* schools across Australia should have equal access to support the implementation of mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Achieving this goal would be supported by aligning the Teacher Workforce Action Plan's focus area of Maximising the Time to Teach with the Federal Government's budget commitment to the Student Wellbeing Boost (\$203.7 million). Coordinating these initiatives will help to maximise available resourcing and promote equal access across Australia to ensure schools, teachers and school leadership are supported to implement Be You and mental health and wellbeing supports.¹⁸

a) Funding designated wellbeing support and integration roles in schools within Action 14

- Recent reviews and inquiries found recurrent themes such as the need for clearer roles and responsibilities, and better linkages between sectors, are required for learning communities to meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people.¹⁹
- Funding a designated wellbeing support and integration role in every school in Australia, would:
 - enable better navigation between mental health and education settings through an understanding of supports available within the local community, when and for whom they are most appropriate, and how to access them.
 - strengthen whole-of-setting approaches to wellbeing by providing on the ground implementation advice and planning.
- Piloting designated wellbeing positions in schools in jurisdictions where this has not yet occurred as part of Action 14 presents opportunities to:
 - implement learnings from jurisdictions where this approach has been tested
 - improve equity of access to wellbeing support across all jurisdictions

b) As part of Action 18, non-teaching staff and teaching assistant roles have time dedicated in their workload to enable teachers and school leaders to implement mental health and wellbeing initiatives such as Be You

- Beyond Blue welcomes the review of the most effective use of initial teacher education students, teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff as part of Action 18.

¹⁴ Quantum Market Research (2022). *Be You National Mental Health in Education: Research Report*. Melbourne: Quantum Market Research

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/classrooms/Pages/resources-schools-Mental-Health-Fund-and-Menu-to-support-students.aspx>

¹⁸ Australian Labor Party, "Labor's Plan to Help Our Schoolkids Bounce Back": <https://www.alp.org.au/policies/help-schoolkids-bounce-back>

¹⁹ Productivity Commission 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra, State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, February 2021, The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Canberra, 2021.

- Administrative roles and teaching assistants are critical to helping alleviate the workload of teachers and school leaders and it is important that such roles are used in the most effective way.²⁰
- We know that time constraints significantly impact on teachers' capacity to provide mental health and wellbeing support to their students. Ensuring that a proportion of non-teaching staff roles are specifically dedicated to enabling teachers to implement whole-of-setting approaches such as Be You will help alleviate some of the pressure on teachers while also building mentally healthy education settings.

Recommendation 3: The 'Better career pathways to support and retain teachers in the profession' focus area prioritise paid time to participate in mental health and wellbeing professional development as part of Action 24

Rationale

- Ongoing professional development across a range of skills and knowledge areas is critical to supporting teachers career development and pathways.
- Despite increased focus over several years on the importance of education settings in the promotion of wellbeing and intervening to improve mental health, evidence indicates that not enough is being done to adequately equip teachers to be able to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of their students.²¹
- School leaders and teachers need ongoing professional development as a core part of their career development to build and strengthen their skills and confidence in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students. Ensuring all teachers are supported to develop these skills through regular professional development, from when they graduate and throughout their career, is crucial to implementing whole-school wellbeing initiatives, including Be You.
- Creating consistent professional development accreditation processes between jurisdictions would support implementing this approach.
- Funding paid time to ensure that teachers and schools are resourced to participate in professional development as well as implement the lessons learnt in a practical setting is critical. Resourcing for paid time to enable teachers to undertake professional development should be equally available in all jurisdictions. However, due to the workforce supply issues and the lack of casual relief teachers, this recommendation is interdependent on additional funding for designated wellbeing coordination roles and increased support from non-teaching and teaching assistant roles to enable implementation of learnings, as outlined in Recommendation 2.

²⁰ Hunter, J., Sonnemann, J., and Joiner, R. (2022). Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help. Grattan Institute; PwC. (2021). How to Transform School Education in Australia over the Next Decade, *The Mandarin*, November 2.

²¹ Anderson, M., Werner-Seidler, A., King, C., Gayed, A., Harvey, S. B., & O'Dea, B. (2019). Mental health training programs for secondary school teachers: A systematic review. *School Mental Health*, 11(3), 489–508.

Be You: Background

- Beyond Blue's vision is that all people in Australia achieve their best possible mental health. For children and young people, education is a universal setting where mental health and wellbeing can be supported.
- There is a critical and enduring need for teachers and schools to be responsive to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, which has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and natural disasters.²²
- Since 2018, Be You: the national mental health in education initiative²³ has been supporting teachers and leaders working in schools, as well as those in pre-service or training, to develop a positive, inclusive and resilient learning community where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health.
- Since its inception Be You has achieved:
 - A reach of 7,252 schools, which is 70% of all ACARA schools and **four times the number of schools** reached by its predecessor programs KidsMatters Primary and MindMatters.
 - A reach of 5,788 early learning services, which is 33% of all ACECQA services and more than **ten times the number of early learning services** reached by its predecessor program KidsMatters Early Childhood.
- In line with global best practice, Be You promotes a long-term, whole learning community approach through planning and implementation tools and expert Be You Consultant support.²⁴ The most effective social and emotional learning interventions and outcomes are embedded in the ethos of early learning services and schools involving educators, students, and families.
- Be You was designed to align with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, the Standard for Principals, the Australian Curriculum, and state and territory wellbeing frameworks.
- Be You offers accredited Professional Learning, online Sessions and Events, Fact Sheets and other resources, and, for participating Be You Learning Communities, expert Be You Consultant support.
- Be You also promotes and supports teacher wellbeing through these resources because we know that if teachers are not mentally healthy themselves, they will struggle to support the wellbeing of their students. Be You's teacher wellbeing resources are among the most commonly accessed: For example, the "Staff Wellbeing" factsheet is the most popular Be You factsheet with over 37 000 downloads as of 31 October 2022.²⁵
- Be You has commissioned research into educator wellbeing and key findings from this research inform Be You's strategic approach to developing educator wellbeing resources.²⁶ These findings also inform our recommendation that more resourcing needs to be allocated to support teachers to implement whole-school mental health and wellbeing initiatives such as Be You because we know that self-care alone is not enough to address teacher's wellbeing needs.

²² Biddle N. Gray M. Rehill P. (2022). Mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 period in Australia. ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods; Tiller, E., Greenland, N., Christie, R., Kos, A., Brennan, N., & Di Nicola, K. (2021). Youth Survey Report 2021. Sydney, NSW: Mission Australia; Australian Human Rights Commission. (2022). 'Mental health shapes my life': COVID-19 & kids' wellbeing.

²³ www.beyou.edu.au

²⁴ Patel V et al. (2018). The *Lancet* Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development. Volume 392. Issue 10157. Giles-Kaye A et al. (2022). Supporting children's mental health in primary schools: A qualitative exploration of educator perspectives. *The Australian Educational Researcher*.

²⁵ <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/educator-wellbeing>.

²⁶ In 2020, Be You launched its Educator Wellbeing Project. Working in partnership with a team at Monash University, five research projects were undertaken: a Delphi study, a series of focus groups with educators, a desktop review of existing educator wellbeing resources, a synthesis of existing Be You data and a rapid review of publications. <https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/five-ways-to-promote-educator-wellbeing>

- Beyond Blue's national survey of Mental Health in Education found that engagement with Be You is having a positive impact on teachers' and school leaders' confidence and skills to support the wellbeing of students and teachers in their schools:
 - Educators participating in Be You felt more confident than non-users at supporting children and young people's mental health and empowered to contribute to the wellbeing of their school or early learning community compared to non-users (60% vs 47%).²⁷
 - Leaders in Be You communities were also more likely to actively support the mental health and wellbeing of educators (67% vs 55%).²⁸
 - Engagement with Be You had a positive effect on community resilience during the Covid pandemic and bushfires.²⁹
- Be You has also demonstrated positive impacts in relation to student outcomes. Be You schools have seen increased NAPLAN scores, compared to schools not involved; and students engaged in Be You secondary schools are significantly more likely to have improved social and emotional wellbeing scores.³⁰

²⁷ Quantum Market Research (2022). *Be You National Mental Health in Education: Research Report*. Melbourne: Quantum Market Research

²⁸ Quantum Market Research (2022). *Be You National Mental Health in Education: Research Report*. Melbourne: Quantum Market Research

²⁹ Dix KL et al. (2022). *Be You Evaluation Final Report: from launch until mid-2021*. Report for Beyond Blue. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

³⁰ Dix KL et al. (2022). *Be You Evaluation Final Report: from launch until mid-2021*. Report for Beyond Blue. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.