

## Abstract

### Objectives

To review the evidence on mental health promotion from determinants of health approaches, and to highlight strategies for policy and practice that will strengthen mental health among populations.

### Design

The evidence on interventions to promote mental health and wellbeing was reviewed for effective practice developments.

### Setting

The resource was compiled for VicHealth and the Victorian Department of Human Services in 2005 to support the VicHealth Framework for the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Department of Human Services Common Planning Framework for Health Promotion.

### Results

Finding evidence of what works in mental health promotion is a vast undertaking because such a range of evidence can be considered. Given the relative recency of mental health promotion as a field of endeavour, the extent of programs with strong evidence is perhaps surprising. Many emergent programs would benefit from a strengthening of research design to enable the measurement of more robust outcomes. More established mental health promotion areas can be adapted or replicated locally, either integrated into existing programs or run as stand-alone programs. There is much scope for health promotion practitioners to include mental health promotion outcomes in a range of programs, and to develop skills and knowledge in thinking about the mental health benefits of programs in many sectors and settings.

### Conclusions

Ensuring communities and populations have the opportunity for good mental health and wellbeing requires work across individual, community, organisational and societal and levels. Mental health promotion is certainly about predicting the possible effects of government policy in promoting or demoting mental health, as well as the ability of government to provide leadership for public and private sector activity. At individual, community and organisational levels, the evidence reviewed in this resource demonstrates that there is much that policy makers and program staff can do to actively promote mental health.

*Margin notes throughout the resource are designed to provide easy access to key terms and links to supporting documents and websites.*

## How to use this resource

***This resource assembles an overview of national and international evidence on the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. Evidence on each topic is presented as follows:***

- a short **intervention description**
- the **population groups and settings** studied
- an assessment of the promotion's **effectiveness** as it is known
- a discussion of **implementation issues**
- additional **comments** (for some topics).

*New learnings and promising practices are included as an extra field. They are included to account for new information that has accumulated through efforts to build up knowledge about what works in mental health promotion but that might not have been evaluated to the level of criteria for this resource.*

- Case studies are located in each section.

## Interventions reviewed in this resource

### **Interventions to increase social connectedness**

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 1. Community building and regeneration programs          | p. 28 |
| 2. School-based programs for mental health and wellbeing | p. 31 |
| 3. Structured opportunities for participation            | p. 33 |
| 4. Workplace mental health promotion                     | p. 34 |
| 5. Social support  | p. 36 |
| 6. Volunteering  | p. 40 |
| 7. Community arts programs                               | p. 40 |
| 8. Physical activity                                     | p. 45 |
| 9. Media campaigns for mental health promotion           | p. 47 |

**Interventions to address violence and discrimination**

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|---|-------|
| 1. Community-wide interventions               | p. 54 |
| 2. Community education campaigns              | p. 57 |
| 3. Programs developed for at-risk populations | p. 58 |
| 4. Programs for young people                  | p. 61 |
| 5. Programs for at-risk men                   | p. 62 |
| 6. Legislative and sentencing reform          | p. 63 |
| 7. School-based bullying programs             | p. 64 |
| 8. Workplace bullying                         | p. 65 |
| 9. Discrimination prevention                  | p. 66 |

**Interventions to increase economic participation**

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|------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Adult literacy programs   | p. 73 |
| 2. Child care programs       | p. 77 |
| 3. Youth employment programs | p. 79 |
| 4. Adult work programs       | p. 80 |
| 5. Housing programs          | p. 83 |

Many of these interventions have convincing evidence, while others, on the evidence available, are only promising at this stage. This resource considers existing evidence, but not the many gaps in the evidence base for successful interventions to enhance mental health and wellbeing.

The VicHealth Framework for the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing is reproduced here for ready reference. Explanations of framework concepts are provided through the resource.

Figure 1: VicHealth 2005 Framework for the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing

