

# MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE BILL

NSW YOUTH  
PARLIAMENT





## **Mental Health De-Stigmatization, Support and Re-Education Act 2021 (NSW)**

The Hon. Claudia Wedesweiler (Blue Mountains)  
The Hon. Damien Doowage (Hornsby)  
The Hon. Jordana Thurtell (Orange)  
The Hon. Sam Borget (Cowper)  
The Hon. Raani Narayan (Strathfield)  
The Hon. James Talty (South Coast)



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## A Bill

for

An Act to support and destigmatize the mental health community by providing education on mental health issues within the wider higher school communities.

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## Explanatory Notes

In Australia, it's estimated that 45 per cent of people will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, with a progressively large number of young people comprising this number. Mental health issues have a detrimental effect on adolescents in today's society, and the lack of available support is dire. It is becoming increasingly obvious that students across the state are genuinely unaware of how to support themselves and the people around them who are suffering. This Bill outlines the steps that must be taken and the processes to be implemented among education facilities to achieve equal and effective support for all.

While there are programs in place with the aim of educating students and combating the mental health crisis in schools, it simply is not enough. Currently available government education initiatives are merely short-term programs that are scarcely advertised, not mandated and have no recorded impact. A lot of government schools are looking to the private sector to implement wellbeing initiatives for mental health, including programs such as 'Batyr,' and 'Find ya Feet Tomorrow Man and Woman.' Such initiatives are run by young people for young people, and whilst this is deemed inspiring, it demands the responsibility of sustainable Mental Health education on young people, and further highlights the lack of governmental support available.

Inequity is one of the leading factors that contribute to the state's current Mental Health crisis. In relation to the education system, many schools, particularly in rural and regional areas, do not have reasonable access to a full-time counsellor, or adequate resources to provide the necessary support their community deserves. In a vital initiative to address this issue, the NSW Government will invest \$88.4 million over a four-year period to provide every public high school with a full-time school counselling allocation, as well as a full-time student support officer. This is an important start, but further actions, as outlined within this bill will prove its worth.

Mental Health inequity affects a variety of people in unique ways, however there are external factors related to one's identity and living situation that have higher impacts on one's Mental Health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at risk of suffering severe Mental Health issues due to employment, housing and education, all products of casual and systemic racism in Australia. Over half of people who have experienced discrimination have reported feelings of psychological distress, with the rate of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nearly twice that of non-Indigenous people. While this Bill largely addresses the faults in Mental Health education, it is important to acknowledge that providing active solutions to employment, housing and education, especially within Indigenous communities, is a vital form of suicide prevention, and a crucial step to bridging the gap and ensuring equal and effective support for all.

The implementation of mandatory state-wide programs and changes to the NESA syllabus, in conjunction with extra funding and continual modifications will ensure the effectiveness of this Bill.



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The Youth Parliament of New South Wales enacts –

## Part 1: Preliminary

### 1. Short Title

This Act may be cited as the *Mental Health De-Stigmatisation, Support and Re-Education Act 2021*.

### 2. Commencement

This Act shall commence 120 days after Royal Assent from the NSW Youth Governor. Thirty days before the commencement of the Act, the department shall publish guidelines, levy fees and action plan date. Businesses will submit an action plan on or before the action plan date, 90 days after commencement of the Act.

### 3. Objects

The objects of this Act are:

- a) To improve knowledge and understanding, for schools, students and parents, on mental health-related topics by mandating mental health care in the NSW PDHPE curriculum.
- b) To improve school-community partnerships, and school-household partnerships and increase the impact of these partnerships on parent confidence in responding to issues of young people.
- c) To support school students with mental health issues via parental relationships with/and the school community.
- d) To increase partnership with external mental health institutions such as Headspace and Black Dog Institute and create a direct link with these institutions to schools and parents.
- e) To improve the overall mental health of school students and decrease the extent to which mental health issues currently impact the lives of students

### 4. Definitions

- 1) The dictionary defines words used in this Act.
  - a) **Schools:** All primary and secondary schools across NSW.
  - b) **School students:** Those studying in NSW schools in years 6 to 12 inclusive.
  - c) **Mental Health:** A person's condition concerning their psychological and emotional wellbeing, as defined under the DSM5 diagnostic manual.
  - d) **External mental health institutions:** Online/in-person institutions that work with youth, outside of schools, such as:
    - i) Head Space;



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- ii) Black Dog Institute; and/or
- iii) Lifeline.
- e) **NESA:** The New South Wales Education Standard Authority.



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## **Part 2: Mental Health Education in Schools & Mental Health Support Partnerships**

### **5. Education about Mental Health in Schools**

- 1) A mandatory unit educating students about mental health basics will be implemented into all secondary stages.
- 2) The units will act as an extension of the Personal Development and Health Curriculum and will cover a range of topics, including:
  - a) The variety of mental health conditions; what they are, and how they can each affect a person's wellbeing.
  - b) Healthy coping strategies recommended by professionals, for school students.
  - c) How to approach evident mental health issues in close friends or family members.
- 3) The new syllabus points will be monitored via formal assessments each term in the same manner as the traditional curriculum.
- 4) Failure to do so would result in the PDHPE course requirements not being met and thus would not comply with NESA. NESA would respond to the malpractice and act accordingly.

### **6. Self-Management Resources for School Students**

- 1) All strategies regarding the management of mental health issues must be supplied and recognised by health professionals in the relevant fields.
- 2) Schools will be responsible for the distribution of self-management resources. They will be required to give out one self-management kit to every student.
- 3) The self-management resource that school gives out to students will consist of two main materials being an assortment of coping methods and an outline of the proper avenue of seeking professional help through counselling.
  - a) The assortment of coping methods which will be given out to students will be sourced from various mental health professionals. These will include thought guides, and methods to assist in positive mental attitude. This will help with mental health among individuals.
  - b) The second resource contained will outline the way to attain professional help. This will include the details of the school counsellor or other mental health professionals. This resource will also contain links to external organisations which will further help the student. This will provide another avenue of help for the students and will make the process of attaining professional help much easier and much more accessible to students.

### **7. School-Community Partnerships**

- 1) All NSW primary and secondary schools taking part in this Act who fail to keep up with all essential requirements of the Act will be identified and approached by the NSW





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Department of Education.

- 2) School-community partnerships will also ensure the education and help provided for mental health is standard from schools, community facilities and the household. This will be done through more connection between schools and community facilities, and connection from schools to the household. This will increase the continuity of mental health support.
- 3) The partnerships from schools to community facilities will be facilitated to incorporate the same help at different places. This will be done through increased interconnectivity between the various organisations. For example, if a school heavily advocates the use of Headspace, and offers a counsellor as mental health support, a local sporting club would work with the school to also provide the same guidelines and work in conjunction with the counsellor to offer their help as well. The facilitation of the different organisations will ensure that everyone has access to the same mental health support, regardless of where they seek it, which will help people to feel more comfortable when pursuing help.
- 4) School-household partnerships will help to facilitate better relations between parents and schools. Where schools will offer certain mental health support guidelines to parents and educate them with how to help manage mental health issues. This will then help parents to be better suited to help students with mental health related problems and educate them on how to transition to receiving external help if needed. The partnership would consist of schools giving parents knowledge of the avenues of help available to students, such as different methods to help communicate with the student, or the path to seek help through a school counsellor.

## **8. Educational Partnerships Between Schools and External Organisations**

- 1) Headspace, in conjunction with the NSW department of education, will create a training guide to ensure all secondary school educators are equipped with the necessary skills to identify and support students suffering from common mental health issues.
- 2) Guides will be adapted from pre-existing Headspace programs, such as:
  - a) Be You;
  - b) Food For Thought;
  - c) Find ya Feet Tomorrow Man and Woman; and
  - d) Batyr.

These programs may also be extended and adjusted through influence from other organisations such as the Black dog institute.

- 3) These guides will help students in two main ways: one, to identify the signs of mental health issues in others; and two, how to support those who are suffering from mental health issues.
- 4) This partnership will work on the pre-existing programs that Headspace already provides, Schools will firstly ensure that all students have access to the Headspace website, and that they have all the necessary resources to participate in the various programs. The school will also express the location of the closest centre for students to attend in person if they would prefer.



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- 5) Schools would also work in conjunction with Headspace, or other such organisations, to create programs which are tailored for the students. This would ensure that the programs effectively target the school students, and that they are as effective as possible. This would also make the programs more personalised, which would lead to them being more productive.



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## Part 3: Monitoring Outcomes

### 9. Monitoring Mental Health Outcomes for Students

- 1) All NSW primary and secondary schools opting into a collaborative partnership with an external mental health institution will be subject to an online outcome tracker.
  - a) This system would publicise the school's effectiveness in collaborating with mental health services and consequently encourage enthusiasm within the school community. Furthermore, a poor ranking may discourage parents from enrolling their child into said school, thus reiterating the vitality for the school to value the mental health of its students, parents and guardians.

### 10. Monitoring Educational Outcomes

1. The educational outcome will be monitored through three main lenses, the first being through the standard assessment style that most other subjects use, a set of quizzes which the students complete at the start and end of the course and finally they will be marked on their attitude and involvement during class.
2. As mentioned in the 'Education about Mental Health in Schools' clause, the new content will be integrated into the pre-existing PDHPE course, thus the content would be examined in the same assessment style as other topics. This can include exams, presentations or practical examinations. The students would be marked and graded as per the normal school guidelines.
3. This course however will also consist of matrix style quizzes to depict more clearly how beneficial the course was to the students, and to evaluate the change that the course may have made. The quizzes will be done independently by every student, and it is the students' choice as to whether the marks and questions are teacher reviewed. The quiz will consist of a variety of questions that evaluate the mental health and wellbeing of the individual. The questions are set in a matrix to cover all aspects of mental health and to give a wider scope on the different educational outcomes that the course will confront. This quiz will be done at the beginning of the course, and at the end of the course. Students can then compare the quizzes against each other and evaluate how beneficial the course has been to them and see how it may have changed them through process, or overall wellbeing.
4. The teacher of the class will also monitor the involvement and attitude of students throughout the course and give them a mark on how involved they were. This will comprise of how involved the student was during class, how much effort they put into pieces of work and how they participated during class activities and discussions.



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## Part 3: Amendments

### Amendment One

Part 2, Clause 9: Monitoring Mental Health Outcomes In Schools

Amendment request (bold the appropriate option):

- AMENDMENT
- **OMITTING**
- NEW CLAUSE

Original clause (paste entire wording):

9. Monitoring Mental Health Outcomes for Students

- 1) All NSW primary and secondary schools opting into a collaborative partnership with an external mental health institution will be subject to an online outcome tracker.
  - a) This system would publicise the school's effectiveness in collaborating with mental health services and consequently encourage enthusiasm within the school community.
  - b) Furthermore, a poor ranking may discourage parents from enrolling their child into said school, thus reiterating the vitality for the school to value the mental health of its students, parents and guardians.

Amendment request:

Omit clause

New clause should now read:

N/a



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## Amendment Two

Part 2, Section 5, Clause 3: Mental Health Education in Schools

Amendment request (bold the appropriate option):

- AMENDMENT
- **OMITTING**
- NEW CLAUSE

Original clause (paste entire wording):

The new syllabus points will be monitored via formal assessments each term in the same manner as the traditional curriculum.

Amendment request:

Omit

New clause should now read:

N/a



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### Amendment Three

Part 2, Section 7, Clause 1: Mental Health Education in Schools

Amendment request (bold the appropriate option):

- **AMENDMENT**
- OMITTING
- NEW CLAUSE

Original clause (paste entire wording):

All NSW primary and secondary schools taking part in this Act which fail to keep up with all essential requirements of the Act will be identified and approached by the NSW Department of Education.

Amendment request:

Inclusion of what happens when the schools are approached by the NSW Department of Education as this clause is too vague.

New clause should now read:

All NSW primary and secondary schools taking part in this Act who fail to keep up with all essential requirements of the Act will be identified and approached by the NSW Department of Education and either given further support in complying with the Mental Health Bill or given appropriate repercussions for non-compliance.



## Results of the Vote

The results of the vote on the amendments were 24 Ayes, 20 Noes, and 1 Abstained. As such, the amendments were resolved in the negative.

The results of the vote on the Bill were 45 Ayes, 0 Noes. As such, the Bill was passed **unanimously**.

The Mental Health De-Stigmatization, Support and Re-Education Act 2021 was **passed in its amended form**.