

PREVENTION UNITED

**Strategic Plan
2018 – 2023**

PREVENTION UNITED

Joining forces to prevent mental health conditions

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DIRECTORS' WELCOME

Health promotion organisations are a vital part of our health system. They teach us about various health conditions and the ways we can look after ourselves to reduce our risk of becoming unwell. They encourage us to eat healthily, exercise regularly, quit smoking and drink responsibly. They also encourage governments to implement policies such as alcohol age restrictions, smoking bans and road safety measures that keep us healthy and safe. Health promotion agencies strive to promote good health and prevent injury or illness, so that people remain well and don't need healthcare.

But what about mental health promotion organisations?

They too focus on promoting awareness of conditions like depression, anxiety, eating disorders, schizophrenia and other conditions. This work is vital and thanks to their efforts, we are now increasingly comfortable to talk about mental health conditions, unashamed to say we experience them, and more prepared to seek help for ourselves or others. This is a fantastic achievement.

However as in health promotion, talking about how to recognise, seek help for and deal with conditions is not enough. We also need to talk about how to stay well and prevent such conditions.

At Prevention United, we believe it is time to expand the conversation.

While we need to keep discussing and destigmatising mental health conditions, we also need to support people to look after their mental health to reduce their chances of becoming unwell. Like our health promotion colleagues, we also need to start advising governments on the social and public health policies that need to be implemented to keep us all mentally healthy.

Mental health conditions are not inevitable. There is now a growing body of research to suggest that we can prevent a reasonable proportion of depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders and we are steadily accumulating evidence on ways to prevent other conditions. We need to act on this information and make the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental health conditions a bigger part of the conversation.

As inaugural Directors, we are pleased to launch Prevention United, an organisation that focuses exclusively on promoting good mental health and preventing mental health conditions.

We acknowledge and embrace the challenge that lies ahead. Mental health conditions are complex and our understanding of them is more limited than many other health conditions.

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But since each year hundreds of thousands of Australians become mentally unwell for the first time, we simply can't afford to wait until we have all the answers before we act. We know enough to get started while we continue to search for answers through discussion and research.

We also acknowledge that no single organisation can achieve prevention on its own. We are therefore committed to joining forces with others from diverse backgrounds, disciplines and sectors to make prevention a reality. We will play our role and we will encourage and support others to play theirs. We are honoured to launch Prevention United and we look forward to working with individuals, organisations and communities across the country to ensure that all Australians flourish and stay mentally well.

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THE ISSUE

Mental health conditions¹, such as depression, anxiety conditions, behavioural disorders, eating disorders, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia and other conditions are common in Australia and across the world. In Australia, **over 3.6 million people** experience a mental health condition each year. Globally, **almost half a billion people are living with one of these conditions**.

The personal impacts of these conditions are profound. People who experience a mental health condition are **more likely to experience poor school performance and early schooling leaving, unemployment, homelessness, separation/divorce, incarceration, substance misuse and poor physical health** compared to people without mental health conditions. **Disability is common and premature death** from chronic disease or suicide are major issues. The average life expectancy of someone with a mental health condition is over **10 years lower than someone without a condition**.

The societal and economic impacts are just as significant. Mental health and substance misuse conditions account for 12 per cent of the total burden of injury and disease in Australia, **ranking third after cancer and cardiovascular diseases**. At an economic level, the National Mental Health Commission estimates that mental health conditions cost our community up to **\$40 billion a year – or more than two per cent of GDP**.

These conditions are a major personal and social issue – whatever indicator we use.

Australia's current approach to mental health conditions focuses on three key endeavours: **raising awareness** about mental health conditions so that people can recognise and respond to them; **promoting help-seeking and early intervention** to reduce the negative consequences of untreated conditions; and **improving the availability, affordability and quality** of treatments, supports and services for people affected by mental health conditions, and their families, carers and supporters.

Over the last three decades Australia has invested heavily in reforming its mental health system. Between 1992-93 and 2010-11, **total government expenditure on mental health increased by 178%** and annual per capita expenditure more than doubled. In the last 5 years alone over \$38 billion has been spent on mental health services in Australia.

This approach has led to important improvements. Australians are now more knowledgeable about mental health conditions, more willing to seek treatment for their

¹ Throughout this document the term mental health conditions refers to mental disorders or mental illnesses as listed in the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the World Health Organisation International Classification of Diseases.

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conditions and a **substantially larger proportion of people with a mental health condition are receiving treatment** for their condition compared to 20 years ago.

Yet despite this success – and the massive investment in achieving it – **the prevalence of mental health conditions has not changed since 1990** and the magnitude of the disability and premature death associated with these conditions remains largely unchanged and unacceptably high.

We need a new way forward.

In most areas of health, people recognise the benefits of **a simultaneous focus on prevention as well as treatment**. National immunization programs to prevent infectious diseases sit side-by-side with the availability of antibiotics and anti-viral medicines. We have water fluoridation and dentists to improve dental health. Social marketing campaigns to reduce smoking, increase physical activity and encourage healthy eating operate in tandem with clinical services for diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Legislative, vehicle safety and public education measures to reduce road trauma complement our focus on treatment and rehabilitation for those who are injured.

By contrast, **the prevention of mental health conditions is barely on the policy radar and government spending is negligible**. In 2012–13 the Commonwealth Government spent over \$3.6 billion on clinical and psychosocial services for people with a mental health condition. In the same year it spent a mere \$22.4 million on prevention programs.

This is equivalent to **60 cents spent on prevention** for every **\$100 spent on treatment**. And yet economic analyses show that investment in prevention initiatives can significantly reduce the cost that individuals and society have to pay for treatment support and services.

Urgent action is required to boost our focus on prevention while simultaneously continuing to promote early intervention and high quality treatment for those affected by mental health conditions, and their families and carers. Only then can we make any real in-roads into reducing the personal, social and economic impacts of mental health conditions in our community.

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ABOUT US

Established in 2018, Prevention United is a bold new initiative that has an exclusive focus on the prevention of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety conditions, behavioural disorders, eating disorders, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, and other mental health conditions. Our focus is on primary prevention – preventing these conditions from developing in the first place.

We are an **independent registered health promotion charity**. Our vision is for a world free of mental health conditions. Our mission is to work together with individuals, families, organisations and communities to prevent mental health conditions by fostering their strengths and reducing their risks. Over the next five years we will:

- raise awareness about the importance and benefits of promoting good mental health and preventing mental health conditions, and the ways this can be achieved
- advocate for greater investment in prevention and for social and public health policies to promote mental health and prevent mental health conditions
- support multi-disciplinary research to better understand the causes of mental health conditions and to trial and evaluate new prevention initiatives
- work with others to translate research evidence into information resources, programs and services that support individuals, families, organisations and communities to promote good mental health and prevent mental health conditions
- partner with individuals and organisations from diverse disciplines and sectors to create a collaborative and comprehensive approach to prevention

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OUR VALUES

HUMOUR OVER PRIDE	We will never take ourselves too seriously, although we do serious work.
TEAMWORK OVER EGOTISTS	We will work cooperatively and will not tolerate selfishness, disrespect or deceit.
SOLUTIONS OVER OPINIONS	We will work towards finding the right answer, not being right.
ECLECTICISM OVER SILOS	We will use an inclusive, multi-disciplinary, multi-sector approach that brings together diverse people, skills and perspectives. Prevention is everyone's business!
RESPONSIBILITY OVER BLAME	We will promote individual and collective responsibility without privileging one or the other.
JUSTICE OVER PRIVILEGE	We believe in the fair and equitable distribution of power and resources and in ensuring that people most in need, get the greatest assistance.

OUR APPROACH

The best way to prevent a health condition is to boost people's exposure to things that protect them against the condition, or reduce their exposure to the things that cause the condition. Mental health conditions are different from many other health conditions. There is no single buffer against them and there is no single cause for any mental health condition. Instead, whether or not an individual experiences a mental health condition depends on the complex interaction between various biological, psychological and social **risk and protective factors** that collectively either increase or reduce a person's chances of becoming unwell. These risk and protective factors may be unique to each individual, or they may be factors in social environments that impact us all.

- Individual factors may include genetic profile, birthweight, gender, age, personality, social and emotional skills, and behaviours such as diet, exercise, sleep and alcohol and substance use.
- Social environment factors may include parent and family environment, adverse childhood experiences, stressful life events, the nature of a person's school, work and community environment, access to education, employment, income and housing, and the nature of the broader economic, political and cultural environment.

Successful prevention therefore requires a multi-level, comprehensive approach that focuses on increasing resilience and reducing risk through individual, organisational and social change.

Since anyone can experience a mental health condition, prevention initiatives need to be relevant to the entire population, although some individuals, groups and communities may have increased needs because their socioeconomic, ethnic or cultural circumstances may put them at higher risk. Prevention United will therefore use a multi-pronged approach that includes:

- Universal initiatives to engage everyone in the population;
- Selective initiatives to engage groups and communities who are at higher risk of developing a condition; and
- Indicated initiatives to engage individuals at very high risk or showing early warning signs of a condition.

Prevention United seeks to assist all Australians and we will therefore collaborate with peak bodies and organisations representing Australia's diverse communities, to ensure that our efforts are relevant and useful for people of all backgrounds and from across all Australia.

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OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

Prevention United will work to reduce the number of Australians who experience a mental health condition through action in three areas.

Awareness and Advocacy

Prevention United will raise awareness among the Australian public about the importance and the personal, social and economic benefits of prevention, and the ways this can be achieved. We will also advocate increased government investment in this area and for the introduction of social and public health policies that promote good mental health and prevent mental health conditions.

Research and Innovation

Prevention United will encourage and support research that increases our understanding of how the various biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to mental health conditions evolve, operate and can be modified. We will also support research to trial and evaluate new prevention initiatives, and how we can take effective interventions to a national scale.

Programs and Partnerships

Prevention United will work with others to translate knowledge into individual and social change. We will use the latest research evidence to:

- develop communications that educate and support the public to take preventive actions (e.g. web and social media content, behaviour change campaigns);
- help take existing effective programs to scale for the public;
- develop innovative new prevention programs; and
- use our expertise in prevention and implementation science to build others' capacity to foster prevention (e.g. through training and consultancy services).

We will ensure that all Australians have ready access to evidence-based information resources, programs and services to promote mental health and prevent mental health conditions.

We understand that we cannot achieve prevention on our own. We will therefore forge partnerships with individuals and organisations from diverse backgrounds, disciplines and sectors to create change. We will place particular emphasis on drawing together those working in mental health with those working on issues such as poverty reduction, child protection, violence prevention, bullying, racism and discrimination, all which are integral to the prevention of various mental health conditions.

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OUR PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Priority one: Create strong business foundations

Objective 1.1

Implement best practice governance, operational and administrative systems and processes to ensure we operate efficiently, effectively and safely.

Objective 1.2

Implement a range of income streams to grow the organisation and make it financially sustainable.

Objective 1.3

Create an inclusive, safe, engaged and high-performing workplace culture.

Priority two: Raise awareness and promote united action on prevention

Objective 2.1

Increase the proportion of people aware of the personal, social and economic benefits of preventing mental health conditions and the ways this can be achieved.

Objective 2.2

Advocate for increased government action and investment in the prevention of mental health conditions.

Objective 2.3

Create a united approach to prevention by establishing coalitions across diverse sectors to support advocacy and action.

Priority three: Build the evidence base

Objective 3.1

Develop and implement a roadmap for prevention research in Australia to guide investment.

Objective 3.2

Encourage and support Australian research into the prevention of mental health conditions.

Objective 3.3

Develop and implement tools and systems to monitor and evaluate our success.

Priority four: Increase public access to evidence-based prevention strategies

Objective 4.1

Provide online information resources to foster mental wellbeing and prevent mental health conditions.

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Objective 4.2

Collate and promote a suite of evidence-based prevention programs for individuals, in partnership with developers and funders.

Objective 4.3

Build the capacity of diverse groups, organisations and communities to promote mental health and prevent mental health conditions through the provision of resources, training and advisory support.

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MONITORING OUR SUCCESS

Prevention United will adopt a rigorous approach to monitoring its success. Each activity stream will have a suite of process, output and impact indicators that will be used to assess whether our aims and objectives are being met. We will also track trends in key population-level indicators through periodic national surveys and through data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and others. Below are the top-line changes we expect to see as a result of our activities.

AWARENESS	The community engages in a conversation about the importance and benefits of promoting good mental health and preventing mental health conditions, and how this can be achieved. They become more knowledgeable and empowered to take action to enhance and protect their mental health.
ADVOCACY	Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local governments acknowledge the importance and benefits of promoting good mental health and preventing mental health conditions. They progressively increase their investment in promotion and prevention initiatives and introduce social and public health policies that support the mental wellbeing of their communities.
INNOVATION	Bringing together community members, with and without experience of mental health conditions, and experts across a range of disciplines and sectors results in new and creative ways to think about and achieve prevention. Everyone has something to contribute.
RESEARCH	Donors and funders enable us to increase research into the prevention of mental health conditions. This research increases our understanding of the causes of mental health conditions and increases the type and number of effective prevention strategies that can be offered to the community.
PARTNERSHIPS	Coalitions are established that bring together diverse individuals and organisations to focus on advocacy, research activities and program delivery that contribute to prevention. Prevention is everyone's business.
PROGRAMS	Australians have ready access to and use the latest evidence-based prevention resources and programs. These interventions help build resilience and reduce risk through individual, organisational and social level change.
CORE OUTCOMES	Through our efforts and the efforts of others, we will gradually see increasing levels of resilience across the community and gradually decreasing exposure to risk factors for poor mental health. Over time this will lead to a decreasing incidence of mental health conditions and a decrease in the prevalence of mental health conditions, and their personal, social and economic impacts in our society.