



Federal Budget Submission
2020-2021

Transforming the Mental Health of Young Australians

Starting the Prevention Revolution: Preventing the *onset*
of anxiety, depression and eating disorders in Australia

Pre-Budget Submission

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Prepared by Healthy Minds

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Australia is on the cusp of a prevention revolution.

We can no longer be driven by the 'firefighting mindset' which responds only to the urgent call of distress once the problem has reached its peak.

We must embark on a bold policy of intervention that starts much sooner. We can greatly reduce risk for – and indeed prevent – serious mental health problems.

This opportunity for large-scale, 'universal', primary prevention of depression and anxiety is now here based on compelling scientific evidence, including our own award-winning, peer-reviewed and published research, conducted at Flinders University.

Even just ten years ago, the theoretical and research knowledge was not yet developed enough. But, starting now, preventive psychology is an idea whose time has come.

Having successfully implemented the Healthy Minds program in forward-thinking independent schools for years, we now have the extraordinary endorsement of 100% of our participating government schools from our 2019 trial conducted for the Health Minister and his department.

The economic benefits that await such courageous policy action are well established and enormous. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Commonwealth to the benefit of thousands of young Australians and their families.

Contents

The Challenge & Opportunity At Hand	05
From the Directors	06
The 3 Golden Keys	07
A New Approach	09
Two Layers of Evidence	10
Survey Results	11
Why 'Universal' Prevention?	14
The Costs of Mental Ill-Health	15
Building Healthy Minds in Australia	16
Our Recommendations	17

The Challenge

Anxiety, depression and eating disorders are the leading cause of disease burden in young people. Episodes of mental ill-health in youth greatly increase the likelihood of recurrent episodes in adulthood.

What's been done to date

Current efforts in youth mental health are focused on early intervention, treatment, and awareness raising.

The opportunity at hand

The major public health opportunity is **universal, primary prevention** in schools.

The award-winning Healthy Minds Program, developed at Flinders University, can substantially reduce the burden and impact of mental ill-health in young Australians by taking a universal, primary prevention approach.

Teaching specific psychological skills, reducing broad risk factors and increasing broad protective factors, provides a platform for evidence-based 'psychological immunisation'.

If we could *prevent* 50% of cases of depression and anxiety we could achieve:

- **Billions of dollars p.a. reduction in economic burden from mental illness**
- **1,500,000 cases of mental ill-health prevented**
- **Thousands of lives saved**
- **Increased productivity, engagement and academic outcomes**
- **Generational benefits and reduced risk for future problems**

Already integrated into the curriculum of proactive high schools around Australia, the Healthy Minds Program is consistent with the guidelines and curriculum priorities of the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)*, and the *International Baccalaureate (IB) learner profile*.

"Evidence suggests we should focus on prevention and early interventions which can reduce the need for more complex and costly interventions."

Professor Alan Fels, National Mental Health Commission (December 2016)

From the Directors

We are immensely proud of the impact we have had on the mental health of thousands of Australians to date. In particular, we have positively affected the mental health of many young people through our award-winning schools program, Healthy Minds.

We have provided young adolescents with the specific skills needed to understand and manage their emotions; to make good decisions in the face of urges; to think in ways that are balanced, realistic and helpful; to be kind to themselves; to regard the media (including social media) with a critical and aware eye; and to cultivate the gratitude and values that will serve them well into the future.

Most importantly of all, we have explicitly taught them these skills before the peak age of risk for anxiety, depression and eating disorders. The result? Young people who are more resilient, better self-managers of their wellbeing, and more willing to take on challenges.

With the support of the Health Minister, the Hon. Greg Hunt, MP, we conducted a trial of the Healthy Minds program in 10 government schools this year, the emphatic success of which is detailed in the pages that follow.

We propose a 3-year plan to up-scale the dissemination of these skills so they are available to every school in Australia: a powerful cross-portfolio collaboration between the federal Health and Education departments that can reverse the dire statistics we are all familiar with.

The opportunity exists now to roll-out this vital preventive mental health strategy and create a generational shift in the wellbeing of the nation.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Nehmy'.

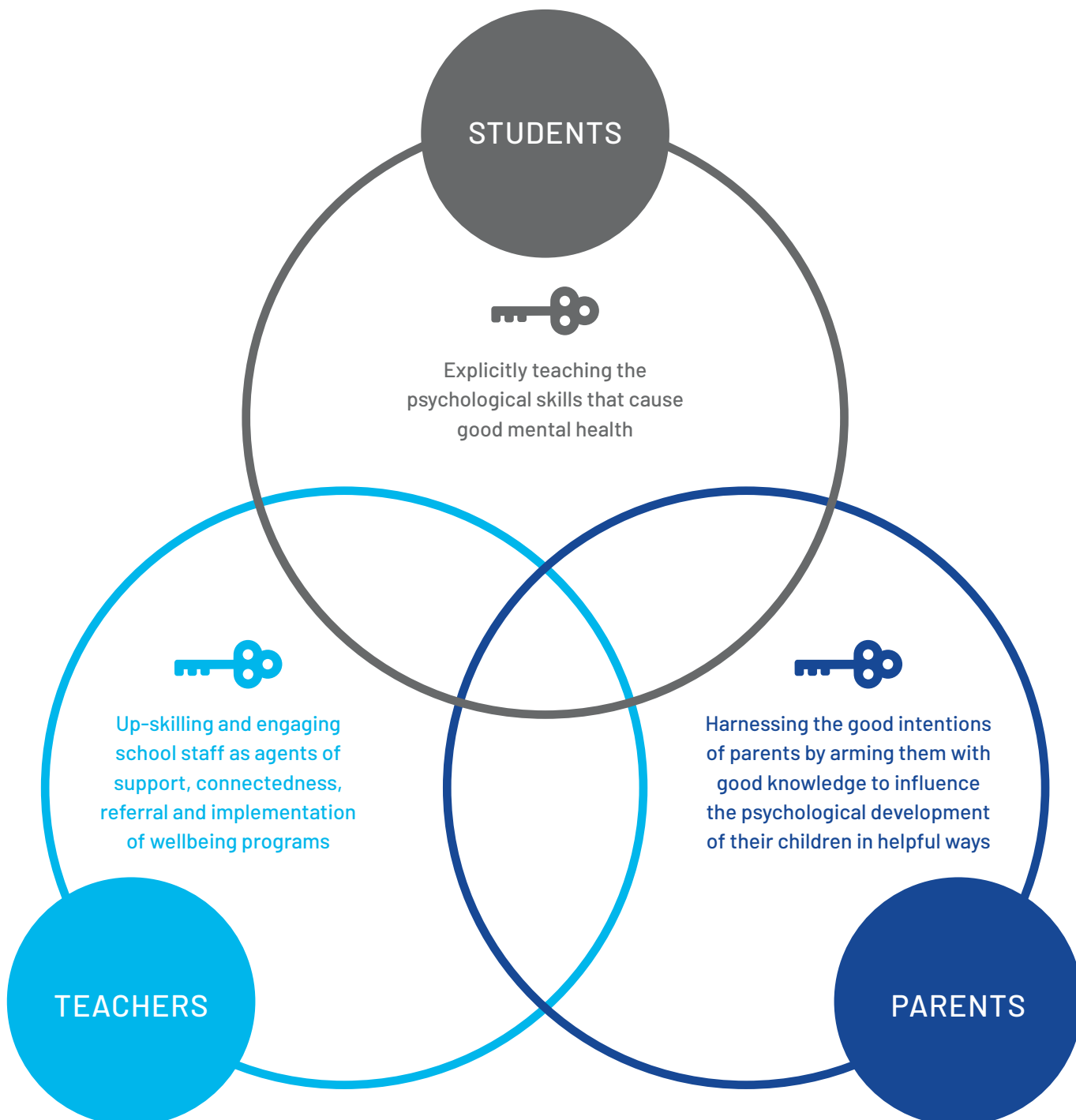
Dr Tom Nehmy
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Lee'.

Mr Nicholas Lee
Director
Healthy Minds Education & Training

The 3 Golden Keys



The 3 'Golden Keys' to doing school-based wellbeing well

The Healthy Minds Program provides students, teachers and parents with the essential skills and knowledge that, when combined, has a powerful impact on student wellbeing. Each of these three 'golden keys' is described below.

Explicitly teaching sophisticated psychological skills to students

Unfortunately, most young people today, unless in the situation of needing to see a psychologist to remediate a serious problem, are unlikely to be explicitly taught the skills and knowledge that cause and maintain mental health and wellbeing.

Of those young people who would at some stage benefit from formal psychological intervention, only a minority will end up receiving it. Furthermore, the majority of adult cases of common psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, can be traced to an onset during the high-risk phase of adolescence. By explicitly teaching the most helpful, engaging, and relevant psychological skills-related content to young people, it is possible to reduce risk for - and prevent - the onset of psychological problems.

Engaging school staff as agents of support, connectedness, referral and implementation of wellbeing programs

Many young people will spend more time at school engaging with their teachers than with their parents. If teachers are to make the greatest possible contribution to the mental health, wellbeing and development of young people in their care, it is essential that they be able to model, teach, and coach young people in relation to the most helpful psychological skills and knowledge.

School staff are also vital agents of building school connectedness, a core protective factor.

Importantly, school staff alone should not always be the sole facilitators of wellbeing programs and the ongoing use of 'expert' interventionists increases the likelihood of intervention effectiveness (Wahl et al., 2014).

Harnessing the good intentions of parents by arming them with good knowledge to influence the psychological development of their children in helpful ways

For schools to comprehensively guide healthy child development, it is absolutely vital that parents be engaged as collaborators in that aim. Parents often have large amounts of goodwill toward their child's wellbeing and successful future, but are not always armed with knowledge of the best way in which to assist them. In fact, a generational shift in parenting practices has seen an emerging phenomenon of 'over-parenting', where parents inadvertently do too much to help their child, and therefore inhibit the natural development of their child's resilience. Exceptional parent engagement is a strategy that can transform schools and the students within them.

Preventing mental ill-health requires a new approach:

The usual approach	The Healthy Minds approach
Reactive and remedial	Proactive, preventive and enhancing
Problem-focused	Skills-focused
Categorical (I'm either depressed or I'm not)	Based on a continuum of functioning
Passive and wishful	Self-empowered
Clinical assessment, based on pathology (symptoms and diagnoses)	Pragmatic assessment, based on wellbeing factors

Two Layers of Evidence

1) Our large, multi-site controlled trial of the Healthy Minds program, conducted at Flinders University in South Australia, was awarded the 2015 Vice Chancellor's Prize for Doctoral Thesis Excellence and was published in the prestigious scientific peer-reviewed journal *Behaviour Research and Therapy* in 2015.

By teaching broad psychological skills to adolescents in a 'universal' school setting, we observed a **lower rate of onset of symptoms of anxiety and depression in young people** in the intervention group, while **reducing a major risk factor for anxiety, depression and eating disorders**. This is believed to be a world-first finding.

Reference: Nehmy, T. J., & Wade, T. D. (2015). Reducing the onset of negative affect in adolescents: Evaluation of a perfectionism program in a universal prevention setting. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 67, 55-63.

2) Our 2019 Government Schools Trial of the Healthy Minds program "Feasibility and acceptability implementation trial".

The Hon. Greg Hunt, Health Minister made available funding for a trial of the Healthy Minds program in 10 government schools around Australia in 2019. The aim of this project was to evaluate the feasibility and acceptability for implementation in a government school setting. The program was successfully implemented in all schools, including three which were geographically and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged. The ten participating schools, including students, teachers and parents were emphatic in their endorsement:

100%
of teachers

believe the program will assist their students to be mentally healthy

100%
of participating schools

requested the program be funded to continue

72%
of students

said they would recommend the program to others

100%
of school coordinators

said the Healthy Minds program assisted them in complying with the guidelines of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

85%
of teachers

believed *their own* mental health would benefit

Summary of Results: Students

Survey data (Feasibility and Acceptability Outcomes) was collected and analysed after the program was successfully implemented in all participating schools. Completed components included conducting teacher training, parent seminars, group presentations to students, and corresponding classroom lessons.

Student Responses (n = 981)	
Mode age = 13 years; 51.7% male; 48.3% female	
Overall, would you recommend that the Healthy Minds Program be provided to other Year 8 students in the future?	72% Yes
Do you think the Healthy Minds Program will assist you in being mentally healthy?	63% Yes
Overall, do you believe that Year 8 students in Australia should have the opportunity to learn about mental health and wellbeing at school?	88% Yes

"It was extremely helpful and one of the best experiences of my life. Taught me a lot of things. Cannot explain how much it helps me on the daily."

"I enjoyed learning about healthy minds and it made me think of myself as a much more valued person in life now. Although next time, you could include some more fun in the activity such as, a prize quiz."

"Overall, I thought the healthy minds program was very helpful and I think it will benefit me very much in my future years in high school and my job life."

"I enjoyed it and I would recommend it for other schools"

"Healthy minds really helped me understand mental wellbeing and I think I will benefit from this program a lot thank you."

"It was awesome I hope lots of other school children and adults get the opportunity we got."

"The Healthy Minds Program was excellent overall. :)"

"It was pretty fun, I liked how he got audience involvement and kind of knew what we were thinking."

Summary of Results: Teachers

Teacher Responses (n = 42)	
Do you think the Healthy Minds Program will assist your students in being mentally healthy?	100% Yes
Would you like to see the Healthy Minds Program continue in your school next year?	100% Yes
Would you recommend the Healthy Minds Program be offered to other government schools?	97% Yes
Overall, do you think your students engaged with the content of the Healthy Minds Program?	90% Yes
Do you think the Healthy Minds Program will assist you in being mentally healthy?	85% Yes

Selected teacher comments from the training day and post-program survey:

"Wow. As good as any PD I have been involved in over the duration of my career (30 years). This would be extremely valuable for colleagues and staff. In fact, this workshop would help my/our school move forward."

"Relieved to hear this preventive approach instead of the pop approach of "positive psychology" – this is much deeper."

"The best PD I've participated in. Very relevant to not only students' lives but our own. Excellent."

"Absolutely fantastic! This needs to be available to all schools, students and staff! Excellent initiative."

"Wellbeing as a concept should be taught, and this program is a huge step in the right direction."

"Thank you for all the work that has gone into this program. We can now revisit these concepts at the student's point of need, as now they have foundation knowledge. Brilliant program and we hope we can do this again with another cohort. Thank you!"

"I believe this should be undertaken over an entire year, and the concepts introduced at a slower rate that would enable a deeper understanding and practice. Also I believe that linking the concepts so that Home Group teachers of higher year levels understand them and have the ability to remind students and provide further exercises would be extremely useful. Basically so this becomes a High-School year 8-12 program that would underpin the entire curriculum."

Summary of Results: School Coordinators

The School Coordinators were the senior staff member nominated from each school, usually student wellbeing officers or middle-school leaders, who were responsible for the school-side administration of the program.

School Coordinator Responses (n = 10)	
Our school was able to successfully implement the program (i.e., we enabled 8 group presentations and 8 classroom lessons for Year 8s)	100% Yes
Our teachers who were trained in the classroom delivery of Healthy Minds were able to follow the Teachers' Guide and deliver on the learning objectives of the program.	100% Yes
If government funding was available, we would request to have the program again next year.	100% Yes
The Healthy Minds Program supports our school in complying with the guidelines of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework.	100% Yes
Overall, our school staff were supportive and engaged with the delivery of the program.	100% Yes
The Healthy Minds Program added value to the student wellbeing approach at our school.	100% Yes
Overall, I believe the students have benefited from having Healthy Minds at our school.	100% Yes

"An extremely well-developed program. The teacher training allowed our teachers to feel confident in their delivery. The program was delivered in an engaging manner and at a level which allowed all students to engage and build the skills to become effective self-managers of their wellbeing. Great resources and outstanding support from Dr Nehmy and his team."

"For all students, this program's content should be compulsory."

"We feel very lucky to have been able to part of this trial. The program has really important content and is relevant to young people in schools today."

Why this approach, and why now?

World recognised experts, including Australia's own Professor Anthony Jorm from the University of Melbourne, make strong recommendations in order to eradicate the "epidemic" of mental ill-health, including:

- Embed prevention approaches in major institutions including schools and at the community level
- "Structural" funding is required for large-scale prevention
- Simultaneously target multiple determinants of mental health: for example, enhance parenting as well as teaching emotion-regulation skills to young people
- Emphasis must be placed on 'universal' prevention (i.e., not just for those considered 'at risk')

Reference: Ormel, J., Cuijpers, P., Jorm, A., & Schoevers, R. A. (2019). Fixation what is needed to eradicate the depression epidemic, and why. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 200177.

Prof Tony Jorm is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Melbourne. His research focuses on building the community's capacity for prevention and early intervention with mental disorders.



Prof Jorm is the author of 34 books or monographs, over 600 journal articles and over 30 chapters in edited volumes. He has been awarded a Doctor of Science for his research and elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. He is Editor-in-Chief of *Mental Health & Prevention* and an Associate Editor of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. Previous positions he has held include NHMRC Australia Fellow, Chair of the Research Committee of Australian Rotary Health and President of the Australasian Society for Psychiatric Research. He has been listed in ISI HighlyCited.com as one of the most cited researchers in Psychology/Psychiatry.



Why 'universal' prevention?

Universal prevention means the program is available to everyone within a cohort, not simply those who are already experiencing problems, or who are deemed 'at risk'. Universal prevention is about ensuring everyone gets to learn these important skills. It is about keeping healthy young people healthy.

Helping the Commonwealth deliver on its policy goals

Prevention is one of the primary reform areas identified in the Draft Report of the Productivity Commission into Mental Health. It cites draft recommendations including increasing parent education into mental health (17.2), the implementation of a “mental illness prevention policy” in schools (17.3) including both relevant curriculum-based programs and ongoing teacher professional development.



“...ensuring that we’re well, not just physically but mentally, is very, very important.”

The Hon. Scott Morrison, Prime Minister



“Mental health should rate alongside physical health in our health system.”

“...what we particularly want to do is expand resilience programs in schools and in communities.”

The Hon. Greg Hunt, Minister for Health

We strongly support the government’s prioritisation of mental health and working towards zero suicides.

Image source: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/who-we-are/ministers>



The Costs of Mental Ill-Health

“The cost to the Australian economy of mental ill-health and suicide is, conservatively, in the order of \$43 to \$51 billion per year. Additional to this is an approximately \$130 billion cost associated with diminished health and reduced life expectancy for those living with mental ill-health.”

Source: Productivity Commission, Mental Health, Draft Report.

Building Healthy Minds in Australia: Providing knowledge and skills for a new generation

What we offer students (main component delivered at Year 8):

- A framework for thinking about, and managing, their personal wellbeing (mental health). We teach an integrated, holistic, and evidence-based model called the Wellbeing Wheel.
- The idea that wellbeing is linked with performance. Being mentally healthy and maintaining high levels of personal wellbeing results in more focus, motivation and energy for optimal performance.
- The purpose and function of emotions, and how to manage them.
- The specific cognitive skills associated with good mental health (The Helpful Thinking Process).
- How perfectionism can impede achievement, and what to do about it.
- How to be critical consumers of the media (including social media).
- Self-compassion – a powerful practice that is vastly more important than self-esteem.
- The power of gratitude as a means to increase wellbeing.
- The idea that stress is neither good nor bad – it is about having the right amount of stress, and what you do about it.
- Personal values and learning from the wisdom of others.

For parents and teachers, we provide an overview of the above psychological skills, plus:

- Clear definition of what resilience is, and how parents and teachers can help children cultivate it
- The “great mistake” parents make by over-parenting, how it causes problems and what to do about it.
- The specific risk and protective “pathways” that influence risk for anxiety, depression and eating disorders; and the parenting strategies that greatly reduce the likelihood of these problems.
- How ‘connectedness’ is a major protective factor against mental ill-health, and how to cultivate it.

The Healthy Minds program is delivered by registered psychologists in conjunction with schools, and involves a combination of group presentations to students, classroom lessons, student workbooks, teacher training and lesson plans, parent seminars and resources and digital resources and remote delivery options.

While many worthwhile initiatives are focused on the treatment of mental ill-health in Australia, the **primary prevention of anxiety, depression and eating disorders** remains the critical next step in creating a generational shift in Australia's mental health.

Given the favourable outcome of the government schools pilot trial, we propose a cross-portfolio collaboration between Health and Education to facilitate a national roll-out of the Healthy Minds program, funded by the Department of Health.

We propose a 3-year staged scaling-up of the Healthy Minds program to potentially reach all government high-schools in Australia. We have developed and tested multi-modal delivery of our program to reach rural and remote schools.

Schools are able to apply to receive the program, and our operations centre provides a point of liaison for coordinating the planning, resources and logistics of implementing the program.

We consider aspects of our program are also relevant for primary schools, sporting clubs, youth groups, pre-schools, kindergartens, childcare centres and community groups, particularly our parenting seminars.

Estimated 3-year Project Cost: \$49.8m	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Recommended Federal Investment	\$4.2m	\$12.6m	\$33m

Reference: Wahl, M. S., Adelson, J. L., Patak, M.A., Passel, P., & Hautzinger, M. (2014). *Teachers or psychologists: who should facilitate depression prevention programs in schools?* International journal of environmental research and public health, 11(5), 5294- 5316.

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