Our approach to mental health
and wellbeing

Fay Fuller Foundation

Our approach to mental health and wellbeing

Strengthening the conditions that keep people well while challenging the systems that are making people unwell.

This document shares what informs the Foundation's approach and intentions for providing funding and working towards better preventative approaches for mental health and conditions for wellbeing for South Australians. We hope this provides clarity for those who apply for a Foundation grant, those looking to collaborate with the Foundation, or others who are working towards similar goals with community.

We have intentionally kept this brief and big picture but would be happy to discuss this further or in reference to your context if you have any questions. We've included links to additional resources that may be helpful if you are interested or want to learn more about any of the terms referenced.

We understand that what has informed other people's approach or understanding of mental health and community responses will likely be different and encourage people who are applying for a grant to share with us what it means to them or for their community in their own words.

Early Intervention and Preventative Approaches
While we recognise the importance of efforts to improve early intervention, we know that we need to be taking preventative action if we want to decrease the rates of people experiencing mental distress and enable the conditions for people to be well. Prevention is a space where it is difficult to capture and quantify impact, often making it harder to access traditional funding. We see a role for philanthropy in funding this gap and supporting evidence-building to spark systemic shifts in how we understand, develop, and fund preventative approaches for mental health and the conditions for wellbeing.

Early intervention sounds like...
- How do we reduce wait times for people that want to see a psychologist?
- How can we identify young people that are at higher risk of developing a mental illness?
- How do we create supportive spaces for people experiencing suicidal ideation?

Prevention sounds like...
- What conditions do people need in order to thrive?
- How can we enable these conditions in diverse and culturally informed ways?
- How can we increase people's choices and pathways to strengthen their wellbeing and support them to be mentally healthy?
- How can we make it easier for people to live (what constitutes to them) a good life?

Whether you want to refer to it as upstream vs. downstream or the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff vs. the guardrail at the top, we are all about preventative approaches, distinct from early intervention.

Levels of mental distress among communities need to be understood less in terms of individual pathology and more as a response to relative deprivation and social injustice.

- World Health Organisation Europe.

Working in the preventative space requires that we strengthen the understanding of the social determinants that contribute to an individual's or a community's capability to be well, acknowledging that an individual's or a community's interaction with social determinants may be complex, intersectional, and compounding. Social determinants of health include the many factors that affect the way we live, work, play, and age in our communities. Although not exhaustive, these include:
- early life circumstances
- physical and natural environment, including natural disasters
- culture
- discrimination, racism, and social exclusion
- employment, education, and literacy

There is further work to be done in Australia to recognise, understand, and importantly respond to the additional impact of experiences of institutional racism and intergenerational trauma on wellbeing.

Schools of thought, approaches, & resources that shape how the Foundation understands & supports preventative approaches for mental health and the conditions for wellbeing.

Strengths-Based

The strengths-based approach to mental health was developed as a person-centred and compassionate alternative to the medical treatment model. Being strengths-based in your approach means identifying, valuing, and building on the abilities and strengths of an individual or community instead of framing in terms of deficits or problems.

Resources

Principles of Strength-Based Practice

The Strengths Approach (Expanded Second Edition)

Wellbeing Focussed

Wellbeing is a broader method for positively framing mental health and stems from the understanding that being mentally healthy is more than just the absence of a mental illness. Mental health as individual wellbeing is broad, incorporating aspects of good health including a person's physical, social, mental, spiritual and environmental state; and recognises that a person's mental health is influenced by complex interactions of numerous factors.

Resources

Well-Being Concepts | HRQOL | CDC

Concepts of Mental and Social Wellbeing

On a Continuum

The Dual Continuum Model (DCM) regards mental health and mental illness as separate constructs. Through this approach we can see that having a mental illness and having positive mental health are not mutually exclusive and that positive mental health can minimise the chance of developing a mental illness, as well as improve the likelihood of recovery.

Similarly, the Languishing Flourishing model proposes that mental health exists on a continuum from flourishing (or positive mental health) to languishing (or negative mental health, but not necessarily having a mental illness).

Resources

The dual continuum of mental health and mental illness | Child Safety Practice Manual

Languishing Flourishing Model

Culturally Relevant

Different communities and identities will have different interpretations, understandings and relationships with mental health and concepts of wellbeing. Culture, including beliefs, values, norms, and behaviours, affect how we experience and interpret the world, including the meaning we impart to mental health or distress. Cultural meanings of mental health and wellbeing can impact how symptoms are perceived and expressed, as well as stigma attached to and likelihood of reaching out for support. When a decision is made to access support the dominant, often white, and medicalised approach is often not culturally relevant.

Resources

Identity and Cultural Dimensions | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness

Four Ways Culture Impacts Mental Health

For many First Nations Peoples, health is viewed as more than just the physical health of an individual. Individual and community wellbeing are interconnected: an individual's wellbeing is not distinct from the wellbeing of community. The wellbeing of First Nations communities and individuals can be influenced by social determinants, institutional interference, racism, and intergenerational trauma. Community wellbeing is found in cultural identity, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and connection to Country and family.

Resources

Understanding Aboriginal Models of Selfhood: The National Empowerment Project's Cultural, Social, and Emotional Wellbeing Program in Western Australia

Social and emotional wellbeing and mental health policy and resources

Social & emotional wellbeing - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC

What does this mean for your application?

Trauma Informed

This approach understands that most people have experienced and are living with some level of trauma, whether visible or not. Trauma-informed approaches consider the pervasive nature of trauma and promote environments of healing and recovery rather than practices and services that may inadvertently re-traumatise. Trauma informed responses encourage understanding, promote safety, rebuild control, focus on strengths and promote connection.

Similarly, the Power Threat Meaning framework provides a new perspective on why people sometimes experience a range of distress, confusion, fear, despair, and troubled or troubling behaviour. Instead of asking what's wrong with you, it focuses on what happened to you, what effect did that have, and what strengths do you have to rely on?

Resources

Trauma-informed Care - Phoenix Australia

Talking About Trauma

Power Threat Meaning Framework Overview

Power Threat Meaning Framework ppt.

Trauma-informed Care - Phoenix Australia.

Talking About Trauma

Living/ Lived Experience

Now is the time to move from acknowledging the value of lived experience to embedding it in how we do things. This means creating and supporting opportunities for people with living/ lived experience to meaningfully and equally contribute at all levels, including by leading. Through authentic co-designed approaches that support individual determination and improved wellbeing we can move beyond biomedical and 'illness' dominated narratives and reach a point where compassionate care, choice, and holistic support is standard.

Resources

Centring Lived Experience, Ellie Hodges, Executive Director, LELAN

Takeaways from this approach:

- Not about 'solutionising' or fixing people, but about sitting in possibility. This requires time to deeply understand community needs and look for opportunities that build on existing strengths and assets.
- Valuing listening to, learning from, embedding, and leading with lived and living experience.
- Actively including the diversity within a community, including intersectional identities.
- We want to understand what preventative approaches to mental health means in the context of your community. It does not need to prescribe to the specific schools of thought and approaches presented above.

The Foundation supports approaches to mental health that are preventative or contribute to creating the conditions for wellbeing that are aligned with these ways of understanding and supporting the role of individuals and communities in determining what is right for them and their context.

We understand that in recognising the broad social determinants that contribute to a person's mental health and wellbeing it can be hard to determine whether your opportunity is a proposal for mental health and wellbeing. We approach this by reviewing whether the proposal aims to improve the conditions for wellbeing and mental health as the primary intention and outcome of the proposal, not a secondary benefit.

Please reach out if you would like to discuss this document or your proposal to the Foundation and how it aligns.