

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Fay Fuller Foundation (FFF) adopts a holistic approach to mental health that is strengths based, wellbeing focussed and cognisant of the complex interplay between social, environmental, psychological and biological factors.

While we value and respect mainstream mental health responses, we recognise that in order to shift from treatment to prevention we need to begin building both individual and community capability to support each other and to build better mental health and wellbeing for the South Australian community.

In Australia, the prevailing view that underpins many mainstream mental health responses is the concept of mental illness as an individual biological or genetic 'deficit' requiring medical diagnosis and treatment. According to this model, positive mental health and having a mental illness sit at opposite ends of a mental health spectrum and are mutually exclusive.

Health interventions guided by this individual deficit model of mental health are typically:

- reactive
- focused on the individual
- service dependent

By only emphasising the problems and failures in people with mental illness we neglect to consider people's inherent strengths or other unique characteristics that could help to improve their mental health. This is why listening to the voice of people with lived experience of mental distress is vital for creating preventative responses that see the whole person.

We also overlook the many important social determinants of health and their impact on people's mental health. Social determinants of health include the many factors that affect the way we live, work, play and age in our communities. Although not an exhaustive list, these include:

- early life circumstances
- physical and natural environment, including natural disasters
- culture, discrimination, and social exclusion
- employment, education, and literacy

- health and social services
- social environment & social support networks
- housing
- access to community resources
- income and social status.

The strength-based approach to mental health was developed as a positive alternative to the medical treatment model. This approach focuses on the abilities and strengths of an individual, seeking to build a person's confidence to progress on a journey of mental health recovery.

Wellbeing is a broader method for positively framing mental health. It stems from the understanding that being mentally healthy is more than just the absence of a mental illness. Mental health as individual wellbeing is a broad concept that incorporates aspects of good health including a person's physical, social, mental, spiritual and environmental state; and recognises that a person's mental health depends on a complex interaction of social, environmental, psychological and biological factors.

Similarly, 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 recovering from depression, anxiety and panic disorders.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, health has traditionally been 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. In this sense, wellbeing includes social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing as well as an understanding of the importance of the connection between person, land and identity.

Feel free to reach out to us for further resources on strengths based, holistic, and preventative approaches to mental health and wellbeing.