



# Supporting study & mental wellbeing

Rowan Jeffrey

# Student mental health in the news:

“Demand for university counselling services grows 25 per cent in two years”

Students “on suicide watch for friends and flatmates”

A “here and now tsunami of need that is not being met by providers of care”

“Christchurch earthquakes devastated mental-health services”

Universities “a substitute for underfunded community mental health services”

Students: “self-medicating with alcohol and marijuana (is) common, particularly during periods of high stress”.

“Growing need for mental health services at university putting students at risk”

Secondary schools reporting students “struggling more than ever, with concerns including eating disorders, severe mental health issues, anxiety and depression to the point of being suicidal”.

“Poor mental health and wellbeing can impact students’ academic performance and their desire to remain in higher education.”

# Why are tertiary students vulnerable?

**Universities New Zealand** (2018) identifies the following:

- High proportion of ages 18-25, the period of life where mental health issues often emerge
- Identity development
- Transition from family/school to independent living & new social environment
- Exposure to drugs/alcohol & need to self-manage
- Relationship issues
- Financial stress
- Sexual harassment/assault
- Technology-related sleep issues
- Increased use of deliberate self-harm as a coping strategy
- Higher risk groups including rainbow community (LGBTQ+)

# Issues for tertiary institutions

## Universities New Zealand (2018):

- Students are a vulnerable population
- Tertiary education can be a pressured/stressful experience
- Tertiary staff are not mental health experts & formal diagnosis & treatment is outside of their role/scope of practice
- Lack of “agency interoperability” – silos not communicating
- DHBs “lack respect” for university health professionals’ referrals
- Scarcity of accessible specialist and community-based services
- Intervention is crisis-based vs prevention-based (identified also in He Ara Oranga Government MHA inquiry report)

## NZUSA (2018):

- “Academic anxiety” was identified by 51% of student respondents as a cause of their (self-identified) depression, stress and anxiety
- Need to increase numbers of counsellors to reduce waiting times for those seeking support
- Students with mental health concerns may not be using services provided (pp. 66-81)

# Mental wellbeing at Ara

In addition to issues identified earlier:

- Highest risk group for suicide is young male trades students
- 4 suicides in the past 18 months – with ripple effect of psychological distress across communities
- Related to wider concern about suicide risk in construction industry (highest risk group in NZ, closely followed by forestry and farming)
- Suggested reasons from research:
  - Macho “harden up” culture
  - Undervalued career path
  - Intergenerational issues
  - High stress industry
  - Drugs and alcohol
  - High-risk individuals
  - Intolerance of diversity
  - Customer demands

**For Learning Advisors:** our change to targeted services for most “at risk” students has increased encounters with students struggling with mental wellbeing issues – increases the intensity of work and level of follow-up required for each appointment.

# Strategies to address risk: Ara

## Institution-wide:

- Employment of new manager Health and Wellbeing
- Health and wellbeing focus on student Campus Life webpages: info & contacts (Txt 1737)
- Increased staff PD on Mental Health & Addictions and De-escalation Strategies by experienced mental health nurse

## Student Services:

- **Trades campus:** adopting some strategies from Australian **Mates in Construction** programme:
  - Being aware of changes in mates' behaviour: "are you ok" and "it's ok to ask for help"
- Regular **health and wellbeing activities and promotion** on all campuses (Recreation Centre staff and Student pastoral advisors are proactive in this area)
- Temporary increased provision of counselling services for students (15-20 hours per week; wait times vary from 2-4weeks).
- At City campus **Health Centre nurses** frequently manage on-campus mental health crises
- **Learning Advisors** actively improving relationships with other student support services and Disability Services and advocating for vulnerable students with tutors & departments
- **Learning & Disability Advisors:** fortnightly peer supervision sessions

# Please share your views

What is your experience?

What are your key issues/challenges?

What strategies are you/your institution employing?

What is working?

# Strategies/suggestions shared in session:

- Use of the 24/7 call/text number 1737 – National Telehealth Service funded by MOH ( see <https://www.noted.co.nz/health/health/1737-nz-first-text-friendly-mental-health-helpline/> for info on how this service is going)
- 2 people highly recommended the Lifekeepers programme:
  - <https://www.lifekeepers.nz/>
  - They run face-to-face and online training courses in suicide prevention
- Learning Advisors in several institutions run wellbeing workshops as part of orientation &/or within their general workshop calendar
- Some institutions are targeting support/resources/education to address high-risk of groups like LGBTI+
  - AUT: uses Rainbow Youth to run sessions and develop resources for students
  - Victoria: Rainbow community inclusion officer & staff/student workshops
- EIT: Learning advisor is part of wider support team providing holistic student care
- Mentoring programmes to provide one-on-one personalised support
- Mental health nurses/ trained mental health staff on campus
- A resilience app to help students with anxiety (AUT)



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**Ara**

Institute of Canterbury

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Ara rau, taumata rau