



Mental Health Framework

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE





Mental Health Framework

1 Framework statement

This document exists to provide a framework for the AFL's commitment to social inclusion through the achievement of the objectives outlined in section three.

The AFL Mental Health Framework ensures the AFL industry establishes a shared understanding of the prevalence and impact of mental health as well as how to support people within the industry who are or may be at risk of suffering a mental health issue.

This framework is intended to support and encourage people across the industry to recognise the importance of early identification and intervention for those who have/are experiencing a mental health issue. It is hoped that through the introduction of education and awareness raising activities, targeted research and building the internal capacity across the industry we can ensure that Australian Football is well positioned to de-stigmatise the issue of mental health. Through this established internal capacity a positive mental health environment will be created for all those associated with our game.



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2 Background

The broader context of the AFL Mental Health Framework is informed by statistics which indicate that 24% of Australian young people suffer from anxiety, affective or substance use disorders or other mental illness, while 45% of Australian adults will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. These statistics demonstrate that mental health is a significant issue facing our community, and as a result, the AFL industry.

Research also indicates that issues of mental health are more likely to develop between the ages of 12 and 26 than at any other stage of life. Only 15% of young males suffering from a mental illness currently receive treatment. In 2009 approximately 772 young Australians committed suicide due to a mental illness.

The average age of the AFL playing group is 23 years. While AFL coaches, key support staff and administrators are by majority older than the 12 to 26 year old age group, the AFL industry represents a unique environment that often demands significant working hours with varying degrees of job security. These factors when considered against the above research provide a rationale for coaches to be considered an important stakeholder of this framework.



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3 Objectives

The aim of the AFL Mental Health Framework is to:

- Promote the importance of the mental health and wellbeing of those within the AFL industry;
- Educate and raise awareness of the AFL industry of the prevalence and impact, causal factors and categories of mental illness that exist across the community;
- To build the capacity of the AFL industry to recognise the signs, activate early intervention and support those who may be suffering a mental illness.

The framework objectives will be achieved through the six key areas outlined in diagram 1.

Diagram 1



4 Scope

The framework is designed to support the development and implementation of initiatives that inform or address the issue of mental health within Australian Football, at the national, state league or community level.

The scope of the AFL's Mental Health Framework extends to all persons whether working in a paid or voluntary capacity, within the AFL industry.

In considering the scope of this framework the AFL industry recognises the need for collaboration across a range of organisations, including the:

- AFL
- AFLPA
- AFL Clubs
- AFL Coaches' Association
- Health industry experts





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5 Definitions

The World Health Organisation states that the term 'mental disorder' broadly covers:

- Mental illness
- Mental retardation
- Personality disorders
- Substance dependence

For the purposes of this framework the following are defined as:

AFL – the body responsible for the game of Australian Football, including codes, rules and policies that support the game.

AFL Clubs – the 18 organisations that form part of the AFL competition.

AFL Coaches' Association – the representative body for AFL Coaches.

AFL Mental Health Working Group – the group responsible for development, implementation and evaluation of the AFL's Mental Health Framework.

AFL Players' Association – the representative body for AFL Players.

Industry experts and peak bodies – relevant experts and bodies that have expertise in mental health and wellbeing.

Social Inclusion – a state where all people feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society.

Wellbeing – the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.



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6 Roles and Responsibilities

As part of the AFL Mental Health Framework the following stakeholders have key roles and responsibilities:

AFL Clubs – Observe all facets of the AFL’s Mental Health Framework and endorse future activities including establishing and promoting connections with support services and developing social responsibility components of the framework.

AFL Coaches Association – Participate as part of the AFL Inclusion and Mental Health Working Groups.

AFL Cultural Strategy & Education Unit – Oversight of the AFL’s Inclusion and Mental Health Working Groups; participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, education and awareness raising activities across the AFL industry.

AFL Inclusion Working Group – Development, implementation and evaluation of the AFL’s Social Inclusion Statement.

AFLPA – Participate as part of the AFL’s Inclusion and Mental Health Working Groups.

Industry experts – Provide advice and support where required to the AFL’s Social Inclusion and Mental Health Working Groups.

Mental Health Working Group – Development, implementation and evaluation of the AFL’s Mental Health Framework.

7 Awareness-raising activities

Through the AFL Mental Health Framework the AFL and key stakeholders within the AFL industry aim to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of the mental health and wellbeing for those within the AFL industry.
- Raise awareness of the AFL industry of the prevalence and impact, causal factors and categories of mental illness that exist across the community.

Industry and community awareness-raising will be supported through:

- Media engagement
- Incorporation of key messaging with AFL campaigns
- Development of information resources

The following mediums will be used to communicate messages to the AFL industry:

- Online campaigns
- Social media
- Print and hardcopy
- TVC campaigns
- Other mediums as identified





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Education programs

Through the AFL Mental Health Framework the AFL and key stakeholders within the AFL industry aim to:

- Educate and raise awareness of the AFL industry of the prevalence and impact, causal factors and categories of mental illness that exist across the community.
- To build the capacity of the AFL industry to recognise the signs, activate early intervention and support for those that may be suffering a mental illness.

Education programs will be developed and delivered across the industry by the following stakeholders in line with their roles and responsibilities:

- AFL Cultural Strategy and Education
- AFL Players' Association
- AFL Coaches' Association
- AFL Clubs
- Health Industry experts

The following mediums will be used to educate the AFL industry:

- Online education
- Face to face programs
- Peer to peer support programs

Importantly, all education programs delivered through the Mental Health Framework will:

- Adhere to adult learning principles
- Be developed and delivered by suitably qualified people.

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Support services

The AFL will engage with appropriate support services to ensure the AFL Mental Health Framework is supported by recognised and qualified experts. In line with this the AFL will adhere to the following principles:

- The AFL will work closely with the AFLPA, the AFLCA, and individuals representing clubs at the national, state league and community levels to establish appropriate support networks.
- The AFL will draw upon established relationships (e.g. beyondblue and Orygen Youth Health) to support the development and implementation phase of the AFL's Mental Health Framework, including education programs and resources.
- The AFL will only engage with mental health and wellbeing services who are suitably accredited.



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Social response

The AFL has relationships with a number of industry experts and peak bodies. All partners that work with the AFL will be considered part of a social response to the issue of mental health.

Support services will be the key network through which those in the AFL industry can seek support. The social response component of this framework refers to the broader contribution that the AFL industry can make to the issue of mental health across the community. Partnerships with suitably qualified organisations will allow the AFL industry to:

- Promote initiatives that contribute to improving mental health outcomes across the broader community.
- Identify opportunities to promote fundraising and ongoing support for organisations that contribute to improving mental health outcomes for individuals and the community.
- Provide opportunities to engage other associated key partners of the AFL industry, with organisations that contribute to improving mental health outcomes for individuals and the community.



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Research and evaluation

The AFL undertakes evaluation and research across a number of social issues, both internally and through various funding partnerships. There are however areas that require a more concentrated research and evaluation focus, one of which is mental health. The AFL's commitment to evidence based evaluation and research practices will contribute to achieving greater mental health and wellbeing outcomes for those involved in the AFL industry.



The research and evaluation principles that apply to the AFL Mental Health framework include:

- Research and evaluation undertaken will be completed by suitably accredited person(s);
- Research and evaluation outcomes will be shared with relevant key stakeholders;
- Research and evaluation outcomes will be evidence based and adhere to the AFL Research Board Guidelines (*see appendix i*).



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Compliance and accountabilities

The compliance and accountabilities of stakeholders to the AFL Vilification Framework occur through the following mechanisms:

AFL PLAYER RULES –

Rule 35: Discrimination and Racial and Religious Vilification

The purview of the AFL Player Rules extends only to those involved in Australian football at the AFL competition level.

Rule 35.1 Prohibited Conduct states:

No person subject to these Rules shall act towards or speak to any other person in a manner, or engage in any other conduct which threatens, disparages, vilifies or insults another person (the person vilified) on any basis, including but not limited to a person's race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, special ability/disability or sexual orientation, preference or identity.

The AFL, on behalf of its AFL State and Territory affiliates, has developed a Vilification Rule which can be adapted to State League and community-football environments.

AFL MEMBER PROTECTION POLICY

The Member Protection Policy applies:

- to the AFL, the people within the purview of the AFL Player Rules and AFL Regulations, whether they are in a paid or unpaid/voluntary capacity; and
- to each Affiliated State Body, all people under the purview of that Affiliated State Body, whether they are in a paid or unpaid/voluntary capacity.

Clause 4.1 of the Vilification & Discrimination

Section of the Member Protection Policy states:

No league participant or Club Official shall engage in conduct which may reasonably be considered to incite hatred towards, contempt for, ridicule of or discrimination against a person or group of persons on the ground of their race, religion, gender, colour, sexual preference, orientation or identity, or special ability/disability.



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Under the relevant legislation across Australia, unless a specific exclusion applies, it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on a variety of grounds including, but not limited to the following:

- Age
- Irrelevant criminal record
- Disability
- Political belief/activity
- Marital status
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Parental/carer status
- Race
- Family/carer responsibilities
- Religious belief/activity
- Gender identity/transgender status
- Sex/gender
- Lawful sexual activity/sexual orientation
- Social origin
- Irrelevant medical record
- Trade union membership/activity
- Physical Features
- Association with a person with one or more of the above characteristics

RELEVANT FEDERAL & STATE LEGISLATION

The AFL recognises its legislative duty of care under the relevant Federal and State Anti-Discrimination Laws (i.e. Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), State Anti-Discrimination / Equal Opportunity Acts, etc.)