



**Mental Health
Australia**

Mental Health Australia's Policy - Policy and Advocacy Approaches

Mentally healthy people, mentally healthy communities

mentalhealthaustralia.org.au



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Policy and Advocacy Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent and transparent framework for how Mental Health Australia develops policy positions and undertakes advocacy activities.

The policy seeks to ensure that Mental Health Australia's policy and advocacy work:

- Advances the goals, vision and strategic priorities of the organisation
- Reflects the expertise and perspectives of members
- Incorporates the expertise and perspectives of people with lived and living experience of mental health challenges and their families, carers and kin
- Is evidence-informed, independent and ethical
- Supports constructive and influential engagement with governments, parliamentarians, stakeholders and the community.

Policy Statement

Mental Health Australia is the national, independent peak body for the mental health sector. We unite the voices of the mental health sector and advocate for policies that improve mental health.

Mental Health Australia's 2024 – 2029 strategic goals are to drive better mental health policies and systems and unite and strengthen the mental health sector. Mental Health Australia's policy and advocacy work is informed by:

- Member expertise and experience – including representatives of professional groups, service providers, people with lived experience of mental health challenges and their family, carers and kin, researchers and other peak bodies– all of whom represent a diversity and breadth of needs and experiences
- Evidence and insights from research, data and practice
- Practice insights from service delivery and reform implementation
- Mental Health Australia's understanding of public policy and political and government decision-making.
- Insights from Mental Health Australia's Member Mapping Framework, which supports an understanding of member priorities, interests, expertise and engagement across the mental health sector.

Mental Health Australia will undertake policy and advocacy activities in a manner that is collaborative, transparent, respectful, evidence-informed and consistent with its strategic priorities and constitutional purpose.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Board Directors
- Board Sub-Committee members
- CEO



- Employees
- Contractors and consultants engaged in policy and advocacy activities on behalf of Mental Health Australia.

Policy context

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Mental Health Australia Ltd Constitution
- Mental Health Australia Strategy 2024-2029
- Code of Conduct
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Privacy Policy



Guiding Principles

1. Independence

- Mental Health Australia maintains its independence in developing policy positions and undertaking advocacy activities.
 - While informed by members, lived experience perspectives and stakeholders, Mental Health Australia retains responsibility for determining its policy positions in accordance with its purpose, strategic priorities and governance arrangements.
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2. Member Informed

- Members are central to the development of Mental Health Australia's policy and advocacy agenda.
 - Mental Health Australia will actively seek member perspectives through appropriate consultation mechanisms and consider diverse views when developing policy positions.
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3. Lived Experience

Mental Health Australia recognises the importance of actively seeking and considering lived experience perspectives in the development of policy positions.

Opportunities for engagement should be meaningful, respectful and culturally and psychologically safe.

4. Evidence-Informed

Policy positions will be informed by the best available evidence, reflecting insights from:

- Research and evaluation
 - Data and system insights
 - Member expertise
 - Practice experience
 - Lived experience expertise
 - Key government stakeholders
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5. Effectiveness

Mental Health Australia will develop policy positions that improve mental health outcomes and experiences in Australia. This will consider factors such as:

- How to best shape the environment and context that we're working within
- Alignment with Mental Health Australia's strategy and role
- Practical next steps to improve the mental health system, and mental health outcomes and experiences for people with mental health challenges and their family, carers and kin
- Understanding of the current political and policy environment, including constraints and opportunities
- Maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, to best influence decision-making both in the short and long-term



- Maintaining Mental Health Australia's reputation and trust.

6. Collaboration

Mental Health Australia will seek opportunities to work collaboratively with members, governments, partner organisations and other stakeholders where doing so advances shared objectives and does not compromise organisational independence.



Policy Development Process

When developing policy positions, Mental Health Australia will, where appropriate:

1. Identify and define the policy issue.
2. Gather evidence and relevant information, including through consulting members and key stakeholders as needed and as time allows, including lived experience perspectives.
3. Assess risks, opportunities and strategic alignment.
4. Develop a policy position.
5. Obtain approval in accordance with the Delegations Authority.
6. Determine the most appropriate advocacy mechanisms.



Member Engagement in Policy Development

The nature and extent of member engagement in Mental Health Australia policy position development will vary depending on factors such as the subject matter; timeframes; available resources; strategic significance; member interest, role and capacity to be engaged; and the expertise required. Consultation may involve providing opportunities to consult with all members, relevant member networks, or members with specific subject matter expertise, networks or roles relevant to the policy issue (e.g. professional associations for workforce-related issues; researchers for research-based issues; other peak bodies in areas of common interest).

Given the size and diversity of Mental Health Australia's membership, it will not be practical or appropriate to engage all members on every policy matter. Mental Health Australia will seek to undertake consultation that is proportionate, targeted and meaningful, while ensuring policy positions remain informed by member perspectives and aligned with the organisation's purpose and strategic priorities. Members are welcome to proactively contact Mental Health Australia to share their organisation's policy positions.

Throughout the policy development process, Mental Health Australia may engage members through:

- Member meetings (e.g. Member Policy Forums) and webinars
- Member networks or advisory groups
- Surveys
- Written feedback, including email consultation
- Direct engagement on specific policy issues

Mental Health Australia will endeavour to:

- Provide reasonable opportunities for member input
- Consider a diversity of views
- Communicate outcomes of consultations and final policy positions
- Balance competing viewpoints to develop policy advice, where consensus is not possible.

Mental Health Australia aims to unite members around a common policy position. However, the absence of unanimous agreement amongst members does not prevent Mental Health Australia from adopting and advocating a policy position. Mental Health Australia recognises and respects that some members may develop alternative policy positions to Mental Health Australia. In line with Mental Health Australia's constitution (4.26(b)), it is important that members do not act in a manner considered to be injurious or prejudicial to the interests of Mental Health Australia, in advocating for alternative policy positions.

Advocacy

Once a policy position is determined, Mental Health Australia will advocate for that position in the manner that is most likely to influence decision-making.

The advocacy approach adopted, and the level and type of member engagement, will be proportionate to the opportunity, the ability to influence the decision-making process, with decision-making in line with delegated authority.

Mental Health Australia may undertake advocacy through:



- Written advice to government (e.g. submissions, correspondence)
- Parliamentary and Departmental engagement
- Media engagement
- Campaigns
- Sector leadership and convening activities (e.g. aligning public messaging across stakeholders, coordinating communications activities).
- Partnerships and coalitions

Mental Health Australia may engage with members to either inform its advocacy approach, and/or be part of advocacy activities. This may include:

- Adopting joint messaging
- Co-signing letters or public statements with members, subsets of members or other stakeholders
- Co-hosting events
- Joint traditional and social media activities
- Joint or coordinated parliamentary engagement



Roles and responsibilities

Board

Mental Health Australia is a company limited by guarantee, subject to regulation under the Corporations Act 2011 (Cth) (the Act) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012. The Mental Health Australia Ltd Constitution in Clause 9 states that, subject to the Act and to any provision of this Constitution, the business of the Company is to be managed by or under the direction of the Board Directors. The governance of the Company is the direct responsibility of the Board.

Broadly, the Board is responsible for:

- Setting strategic directions
- Approving strategic priorities
- Overseeing the implementation of organisational strategy, including policy and advocacy activities
- Determining organisational risk appetite

The Board delegates to the CEO responsibility for implementation of Board agreed directions and leading the development and implementation of policy and advocacy plans.

CEO

The CEO is responsible for:

- Leading policy and advocacy activities
- Representing Mental Health Australia publicly
- Ensuring compliance with this policy
- Approving policy positions
- Approving advocacy approaches
- Exercising delegated authority for policy and advocacy matters.

Director of Policy and Advocacy

The Director of Policy and Advocacy is responsible for:

- Leading the development and implementation of policy and advocacy activities
- Exercising delegated authority for policy and advocacy matters
- Escalating significant policy and reputational issues where appropriate.

Employees

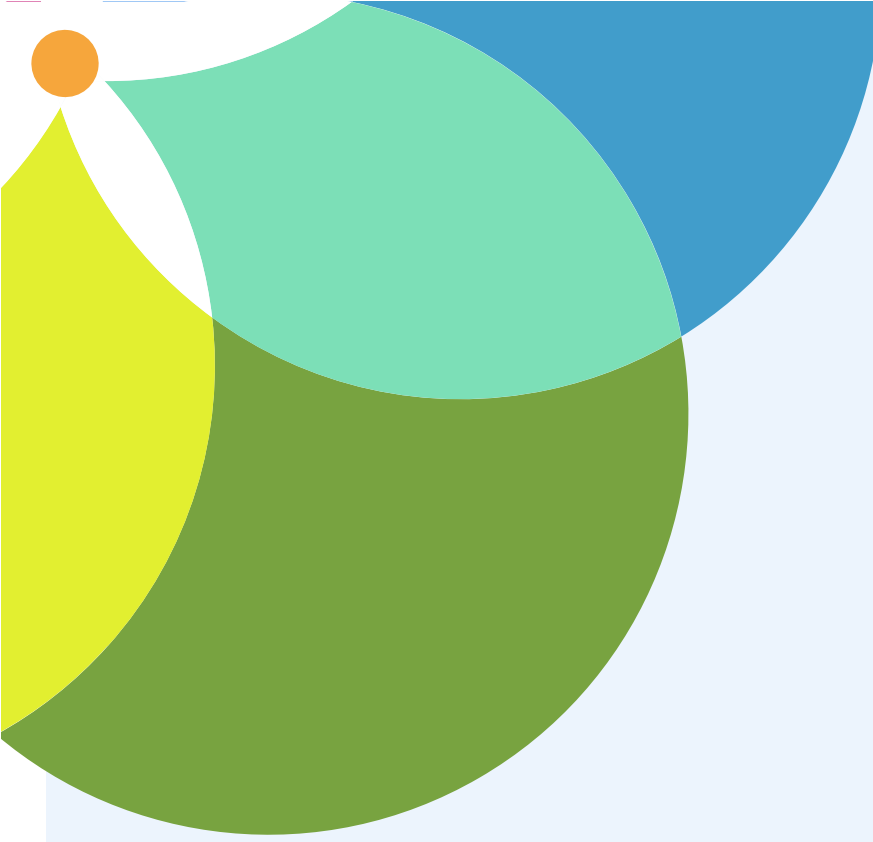
Employees are responsible for:

- Undertaking policy and advocacy activities consistent with this policy.
- Engaging respectfully and professionally with members and stakeholders.
- Escalating significant policy and reputational issues where appropriate.



Grievances and Complaints

If a Mental Health Australia member or other stakeholder lodges a complaint about a Mental Health Australia policy position or advocacy approach, the complaint is handled in accordance with the [Feedback and Complaints Policy](#).



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