Enhancing Protective Factors for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Broadening the Debate: Understanding the social context of youth mental health

22 February 2024

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Promoting Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Promoting youth mental health is integral to improving youth health and wellbeing
  - enables young people to grow and flourish, reduces the risk of poor mental health, and promotes wellbeing

- Growing opportunities and challenges for young people in an increasingly complex and competitive world
  - broad range of skills and supports are needed for positive development

- Increased recognition of the importance of the social and emotional development of young people
  - a key asset and resource for good mental health and positive youth development (WHO, 2021; UNICEF, 2021)
  - enables positive outcomes in school, work and life (*Skills for Social Progress,* OECD, 2015; UNICEF, 2021)

Promoting Youth Mental Health and wellbeing

- Negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health
  - rising rates of depression, anxiety, and stress
  - negative impacts increased existing inequities

- Urgent need for a population level approach to mental health extending beyond individually-oriented treatment

  - mental health promotion interventions that will support people in protecting and enhancing their mental health and wellbeing and reduce mental health inequities (IUHPE, 2021)
  - universal (for all) and targeted (those at higher risk) interventions

- Policies and practices are needed to promote mental health at a population level - ensure that the conditions that create good mental health and reduce inequities are accessible to all

A Health Promotion Approach to Youth Mental Health

- Treatment approaches on their own are not sufficient to improve population mental health (WHO, 2001)
  - need a comprehensive public health approach embracing promotion and prevention alongside treatment and recovery (WHO, 2002; 2004; 2013; 2022)

- Paradigm change in thinking about mental health
  - Broader understanding of mental health - positive mental health and wellbeing
  - Mental health is an integral part of health - interrelationship between physical and mental health
  - Strategies for creating the greatest mental health gain for the greatest number of people – promote, protect and restore good mental health
  - Address the social determinants of mental health and reduce inequities
  - Focus on the health potential of people and their everyday settings for living

➢ *Reframes the challenge of improving youth mental health*

Adopting a Mental Health Promotion Approach

"Mental health promotion is concerned with strengthening protective factors for good mental health and enabling access to skills, resources, and supportive environments that enhance equity and keep individuals and populations mentally healthy" (Barry, Clarke, Petersen, Jenkins, 2019)

https://www.springer.com/in/book/9783030234546

Barry, M.M. (2001) International Journal of Mental Health Promotion, 3(1) 25-34.
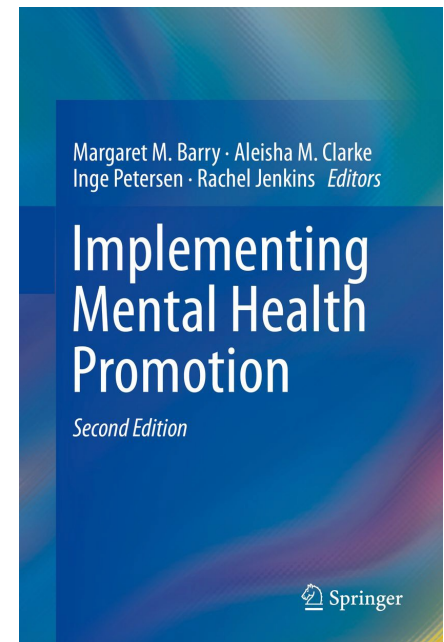
Global Policy Frameworks

- **WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2021-2030**

  "The essential role of mental health in achieving health for all"

  - comprehensive strategies for promotion, prevention, treatment and recovery in a whole-of-government approach
  - to protect and promote the mental wellbeing of all citizens
  - responsibility extends across all sectors and all government departments

- **The UN (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

  - Goal 3 "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*"

  - Target 3.4 "*By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through prevention and treatment and **promote mental health and wellbeing**"*

  - **UNICEF (2021) *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health***

National Policy Frameworks

- *Healthy Ireland national policy framework for improved health and wellbeing, 2013-2025* (Department of Health, 2013)

- *Connecting for Life: Ireland's Strategy to reduce Suicide 2015-2020* (Department of Health, 2015)

- *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone* (Department of Health, 2020)

- *STRONGER TOGETHER: HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2027*

- *Pathways to Wellbeing*: *National Mental Health Promotion Framework* (Department of Health, 2024)

- *Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* 2023-2028 (Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

- *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (Department of Education & Skills, 2018-2023)

STRONGER TOGETHER
The HSE Mental Health
Promotion Plan
2022–2027

Positive Concepts of Mental Health
'mental health is more than the absence of mental disorder'

Mental health may be defined as:

"A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, to realize their abilities, to learn well and work well, and to contribute to their communities." (World Mental Health Report, WHO 2022)

- Concept of positive mental health (Keyes, 2002; Huppert, 2005; Ryff et al., 2006)
  - o subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction
  - o positive functioning, engagement and social wellbeing

- Keyes' concept of 'flourishing'
  - ➢ *abilities to develop psychologically, physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually*

Determinants of Mental Health

- Mental health is determined by multiple biological, psychological, physical, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors which interact in complex ways

    o **protective factors** enhance and protect positive mental health and enhance young people's capacity to cope successfully with and enjoy life

    o **risk factors** increase likelihood that mental health problems will develop

- Cumulative impact of risk and protective factor across the lifecourse

➢ *Mental health is created where we live our everyday lives*

Protective Factors for Positive Mental Health (WHO, 2012)

Individual Level Factors

- Self-esteem, confidence – *self-efficacy*
- Ability to solve problems and manage stress or adversity – *emotional regulation*
- Communication skills
- Physical health, fitness

Social Circumstances

- Social support of family and friends – *peer groups, 'one good adult'*
- Good parenting /family interaction
- Physical security and safety – *absence of bullying and violence, trauma*
- Economic security – *adequate income*
- Scholastic achievement
- Satisfaction and success at work – *community participation*

Environmental Factors

- Equality of access to basic services – *housing, education*
- Social justice, tolerance, integration – *social inclusion*
- Social and gender equality – *race, ethnicity, sexual orientation*
- Physical security and safety – *peaceful and stable environment*

Addressing the Social Determinants of Mental Health

- Strengthen individuals and families
  - social and emotional skills, coping, sense of control

- Strengthen communities - social support, sense of connectedness and inclusion
  - supportive relationships, social participation

- Reorient health services to mental health promotion and prevention as well as treatment and recovery
  - mainstreaming mental health promotion

- Remove structural barriers at a societal level; culture, environment, economic and social policies
  - access to education, employment, healthy environments, housing, role in society
  - respect, dignity, social justice - 'mental health in all policies' approach

(Figure adapted from Nagaoka et al., 2015)

Social Determinants of Mental Health

"Mental health and many common mental disorders are shaped to a great extent by the social, economic, and physical environments in which people live"

- calls for actions to improve the conditions of daily life
- whole of government and whole of society approach – comprehensive and universal actions across the life course, multiple sectors and levels

➢ *policy making at all levels of governance and across sectors can make a positive difference to mental health outcomes*

THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Through the life course & in daily settings across sectors

Healthy childhood development

Education & literacy

Employment & working conditions

Income & social status

Housing

Health services

Race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethic minority status

Freedom from violence & discrimination

Intersectoral action, including a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, to create the conditions that will protect and promote mental health and well-being across the lifecourse and in everyday settings

What Works?

- **Evidence-based** strategies that can be implemented and sustained at a reasonable cost, while generating clear health and social gains

  - **Lifecourse approach:** policies and interventions across the lifecourse from infancy to older age
  - **Settings approach:** actions that can be delivered in everyday settings or contexts and across delivery platforms - homes, schools, communities, workplaces, services, virtual settings
  - **Determinants of mental health approach**: an 'upstream approach' to reducing inequities

- Priority interventions for which there is evidence of effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and their feasibility in terms of cultural acceptability and capacity to be delivered by existing systems
  - o series of evidence syntheses and briefings prepared for WHO and government agencies across high, middle and low income countries

Evidence Syntheses: Promoting Youth Mental Health

Kuosmanen, T., Keppler, T., Dowling, K. , Barry, M.M. (2022*). Evidence Synthesis of Impact of Mental Health Promotion: A systematic rapid evidence assessment of the effectiveness of mental health promotion interventions across the lifecourse.* Report produced for the Department of Health, Ireland.

Kuosmanen, T., Dowling, K. and Barry, M.M., (2020). *A Framework for Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in the European Youth Sector. ERASMUS+ Project www.nuigalway.ie/hprc*

Barry, Clarke, Morreale, & Field (2018). A review of the evidence on the effects of community-based programs on young people's social and emotional skills development. *Adolescent Research Review, doi 10.1007/s40894-017-0055-2*

Barry, M.M., Kuosmanen, T., Clarke, A.M. (2017). *Implementing Effective Interventions for Promoting Adolescents' Mental Health: A Review of the Evidence in the European Region. WHO European Regional Office*

Clarke, Morreale, Field, Hussein & Barry (2015). *What works in enhancing social and emotional skills development during childhood and adolescence*? Report for the Early Intervention Foundation & the UK Cabinet Office.

Kuosmanen, T., Keppler, T., Dowling, K. , Barry, M.M. (2022). *Evidence Synthesis of Impact of Mental Health Promotion: A systematic rapid evidence assessment of the effectiveness of mental health promotion interventions across the lifecourse.* Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway

- review of 111 meta-analyses and 57 systematic reviews conducted between 2017-2021

- evidence supports universal provision across the lifecourse and in key settings, together with more targeted approaches that are proportionate to need

Barry et al. (2024). Priority actions for promoting population mental health and wellbeing. *Mental Health & Prevention*, Volume 33, 200312
 doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2023.200312

IUHPE Position Statement on Critical Actions for Mental Health Promotion (2021)

8 PRIORITY AREAS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Promote infant and maternal mental health through integrating a focus on social and emotional development and positive mental health into early child development services including prenatal care, home visiting and parenting programmes.

Cultivate child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing through school education initiatives and whole-school approaches, including social and emotional learning programmes in preschool, school, and youth settings.

Implement parenting and family strengthening programmes that promote the emotional and behavioural functioning of school-going children and their parents.

Support mentally healthy workplaces by integrating mental health promotion into workplace health and safety policies and practices, including organizational change.

Initiate community empowerment programmes (e.g., community participation, volunteering, youth action, community microfinance and debt management paired with life skills training, and violence prevention/promotion of healthy relationships) to enhance social capital and environments that promote mental health and wellbeing across the life course.

Incorporate mental health promotion within health services through a focus on service users' mental health and wellbeing as part of routine primary health care and mental health services.

Enhance public awareness of ways of promoting positive mental health and reducing stigma associated with mental ill health through mental health literacy programming, campaigns and local community actions.

Adopt a 'mental health in all policies' approach to promote multi- and inter-sectoral policies and actions that create supportive environments for mental health and enhance equity and social justice.

Evidence Base for Promoting Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

- The promotion of youth mental health leads to lasting benefits for the improved health and wellbeing of young people, their families and society (WHO, 2022; UNICEF, 2021)

- Compelling evidence that mental health promotion interventions
  - enhance protective factors for good mental health and wellbeing
  - reduce risk factors for mental and behavioural disorders
  - lead to lasting positive effects on a range of social and economic outcomes –> academic performance, employment, social functioning and health

- Convincing scientific, social and economic case for investing in the promotion of youth mental health and wellbeing (McDaid et al., 2022)

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in the Early Years

- **Promote infant (0-3 years) and maternal mental health**
  - ➢ *integrate a focus on positive mental health and social and emotional development into routine prenatal and postnatal care services, home visiting and parenting programmes*

- **Focus:** universal and targeted perinatal, home visiting and parenting programmes
  - o empowering and strengths-based approach
  - o women and children at higher-risk – teenage parents, mothers at risk of postnatal depression, intimate partner violence, low-income families

- **Evidence:** robust evidence of long-term positive outcomes (Jeong et al., Carter et al., 2019; Ling et al., 2021; Missler et al., 2021)
  - o reduced depression and stress among pregnant women
  - o improved child development and parenting skills
  - o reduced child behavioural problems
  - o improved maternal health and social functioning
  - o social equity and good economic investment (benefit to cost ratio of 23:1)
  - o those at risk making the most gains

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in the Early Years

- **Evidence supports scaling-up high-quality interventions**

- **Examples:** Nurse Family Partnership; Flourishing Families; Sure Start; Community Mothers; Philani Mothers
  - delivered by trained healthcare and community staff, including trained peers – individual, group-based and digital platforms

- **Implementation:** integration into mainstream services
  - policy support, workforce training
  - reaching higher-risk families
  - support proportionate to need

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Preschool Education

- **Promote child mental health development (aged 3–6 years) through preschool education**
  - ➢ *access to high quality preschool programmes that develop children's social and emotional skills, cognitive skills, school readiness and educational success*

- **Focus:** Structured curriculum-based social and emotional learning
  - o child-initiated activities, supportive educational environment plus parent support

- **Evidence:** Strong evidence base for long-term positive outcomes (Blewitt et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018)
  - o improved school attainment, social gain and occupational status
  - o greater benefits for higher risk and disadvantaged children
  - o reduce inequities due to child poverty and poor health
  - o good economic investment (benefit to cost ratio of 17.6:1)

- **Examples:** Head Start REDI

- **Implementation:** supportive policy on preschool education; workforce training; mainstreaming

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40

Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions

Supporting Families in Promoting their Children's Mental Health & Wellbeing

- **Strengthening families and parenting school-going children (3-16 years)**
  - ➢ *access to universal and targeted parenting and family strengthening interventions promoting emotional and behavioural functioning*

- **Focus:** equip parents with the skills and confidence to develop positive relationships, attitudes and conduct in their children

- **Evidence:** strong evidence of positive outcomes - childhood conduct disorders
  - o reduced child abuse and neglect
  - o reduced conduct and emotional problems
  - o reduced psychological distress in both children and parents
  - o targeted programmes (benefit to cost ratio of 8:1)
   - benefits in reduced crime

Supporting Families in Promoting their Children's Mental Health & Wellbeing

- **Examples:** Strengthening Families Program (Kumpfer & Brown 2011); Triple P Parenting Programme (Sanders et al., 2000; 2008); Incredible Years Programmes (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001; 2011); Parents Plus (Carr et al., 2017)

- CHAMP; Lifelong Parenting programmes – cross country replication in LMICs

- **Implementation**: supportive policies on family support; staff training; multicomponent programmes with a wide range of application
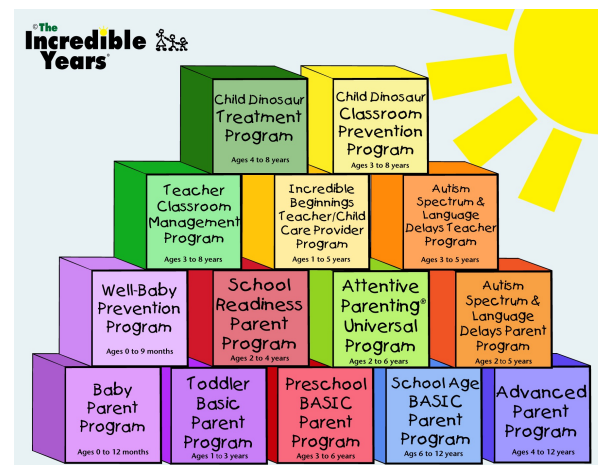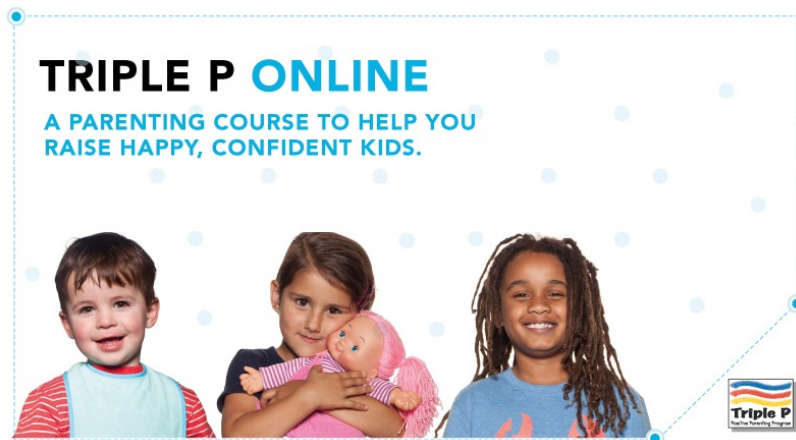
Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools

- **Promote young people's social and emotional skills through whole school approaches**
  - ➢ *access to universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes and targeted prevention programmes in school*

- **Focus:** Whole school approach - teaching of SEL skills using a coordinated and sequenced approach

- **Evidence:** robust evidence of positive outcomes - diverse young people (Taylor et al., 2017; Goldberg et al., 2019; Higgen et al., 2021; Van de Sande et al., 2019)
  - improved academic engagement and performance
  - enhanced positive social behaviours
  - reduced conduct problems - aggression, bullying
  - reduced emotional distress – stress and depression
  - targeted interventions – reduced depression, anxiety and suicidal behaviours
  - good economic investment (benefit to cost ratio of 11:1 to 25:1) – benefits to education and employment
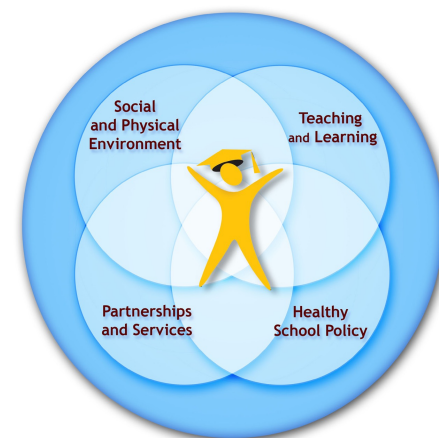
Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools

- Focus on **social and emotional learning** and skills development within the educational system
  - o promote academic, social and emotional competence
  - o reducing school drop-out
  - o reducing negative health and social outcomes

- Essential skills for social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2003; 2015):
  - o **Self-awareness** - know yourself and others - identify feelings, be responsible, recognize strengths
  - o **Self-management** - manage emotions, understand situations, set goals and plans, solve problems creatively
  - o **Social awareness** - care for others - show empathy, appreciate diversity
  - o **Relationships skills** - communicate effectively, build relationships, negotiate fairly, refuse provocations, seek help
  - o **Responsible decision making** - act ethically, appropriate social norms, respect others

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools

Examples: *Evidence-based approaches embedded into the core business of the school*

- Whole school - Positive Action; KidsMatters; MindMatters;

- Anti-bullying whole school approach – KiVa

- Curriculum - PATHS; FRIENDS; Penn Resiliency Program;

- **Implementation:** Tiered delivery within a whole school approach
  - embedded in educational policy – '*Wellbeing Framework*'
  - teacher training and support
  - foundational skills for a range of health behaviours

- MindOut SEL programme for adolescents
  - cRCT in 32 DEIS schools - improved social and emotional wellbeing and mental health outcomes
  - high quality implementation for positive outcomes
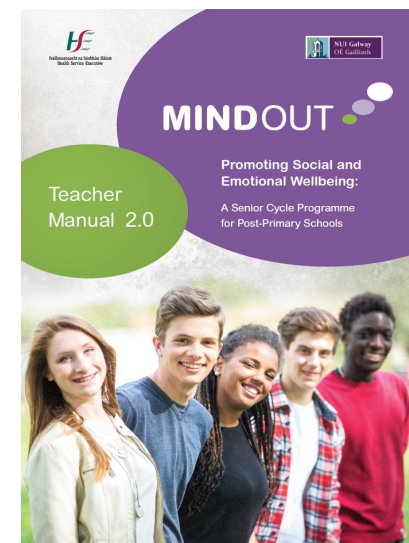
Dowling, K., Simpkin, A. J., & Barry, M. M. (2019). J Youth Adolesc, 48(7), 1245-1263 doi:10.1007/s10964-019-00987

Dowling, K. & Barry, M. M. (2020a). Int J Environ Res Public Health, 17(9). doi:10.3390/ijerph17093249

Dowling, K. & Barry, M. M. (2020b). European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education, 10(2). doi:10.3390/ejihpe10020044

Promoting Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing in Community Settings

- **Promote young people's social and emotional wellbeing through community engagement**
  - ➢ *access to evidence-based strategies especially for those who are disadvantaged and socially excluded – community and youth work settings*

- **Focus:** Youth empowerment programmes that promote life skills, social connectedness and supportive environments for young people
  - o social skills training, creative arts (drama, music), sports, outdoor adventure (Salazar de Pablo et al., 2020; Mygind et al., 2019)
  - o mentoring and social action projects for at-risk young people (Claro & Perelmiter, 2021)

- **Evidence:** evidence of positive outcomes – more structured approaches with high quality implementation (Durlak et al., 2010; Kremer et al., 2015; Barry et al., 2017)

- **Examples:** Communities That Care; Big Brothers Big Sisters; Youth Social Action (UK); Project K Youth Development Programme (New Zealand)

Digital Interventions for Promoting Youth Mental Health

- **Internet and social media as a 'virtual setting' for promoting young people's mental health and wellbeing**
  - ➢ *digital mental health promotion supports for young people, including hard-to-reach groups and those living in remote areas*

- **Focus:** universal and targeted computerised programmes and online supports
  - o evidence for computerised CBT prevention programmes – anxiety and depression
  - o emerging evidence base for digital mental health promotion interventions (Zheng et al., 2021; Leech et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2014) - online gaming; mobile phone interventions, apps; structured online modules; blogging & online support

- **Evidence:** positive impact on mental health and wellbeing
  Kuosmanen, Fleming, Newell & Barry (2017) – cRCT evaluation of the SPARX-R gaming intervention for adolescents. *Internet Interventions*, 8, 40-47
  - o **process and outcomes** – low engagement and high attrition rates, especially among those at higher risk
  - o **equity impact** – positive focus, tailored and culturally appropriate content
  - o **engagement of users** in the development process

- **Scaling-up:** implementation guidance and support
  - o tailored to user needs and requirements, especially for those who are socially and digitally marginalised

Digital Interventions for Promoting Youth Mental Health

- **Atlantic Futures** cross-border project - digital mental health support for young people
  - Aims to promote youth mental health through innovative digital support and blended services in partnership with young people across Ireland
    - collaboration between Ulster University and the University of Galway
    - funded by the North-South Research Programme, funded through the Government's Shared Island Fund administered by the Higher Education Authority

  - Further details on the project website https://www.atlanticfutures.com/themes-and-research/research-stream-4

Bridging the Science-to-Practice Gap

- **Translation of evidence-based approaches into mainstream practice**
  - o **scaling-up evidence-based interventions** across the lifecourse
  - o effective implementation under real life conditions across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts and settings

- **Equity** impact of interventions
  - o impact for diverse population groups of young pople - different ages, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, education and income status

- Concern with **process** - user-friendly, culturally appropriate and feasible interventions in the local setting
  - o customisation and modular delivery (Jones, 2017); co-design – **youth engagement and implementer perspectives**

- **Implementation** support – putting the intervention into practice
  - o resources, training, technical assistance, materials, organizational and workforce capacity, systems change

Capacity Development for Implementing Mental Health Promotion

- **Policie**s that will support the implementation and sustainability of mental health promotion across sectors and settings
  - *Pathways to Wellbeing- National Mental Health Promotion Framework* (DoH, 2024)

- **Practices** that will strengthen effective implementation
  - workforce capacity for integrating and scaling-up evidence-based approaches in the local context
  - implementation systems and support structures
  - delivery mechanisms for embedding mental health promotion practices into mainstream services and supports in a sustainable manner

- **Research** to advance and support effective action
  - expanding the evidence base – priority groups, community-based approaches
  - investing in implementation research – bridging the 'know-do' gap

- **Mobilising youth and wider public engagement** – mental wellbeing becomes central to population wellbeing and government policy

Innovative & Sustainable Action
ensuring that the conditions that create and promote youth mental health and wellbeing are accessible to all