

Time to talk about it: Mental health issues among international students in Australia

31st annual Australian International Education Conference

Hobart, Tasmania, 13 October 2017

Benjamin G. Veness BAcc MBBS MPH

 **@venessb**

Students' mental health is important to several groups, not just the students themselves

Students

Our institutions

Staff

The public

Students are, of course, the primary stakeholder

Students

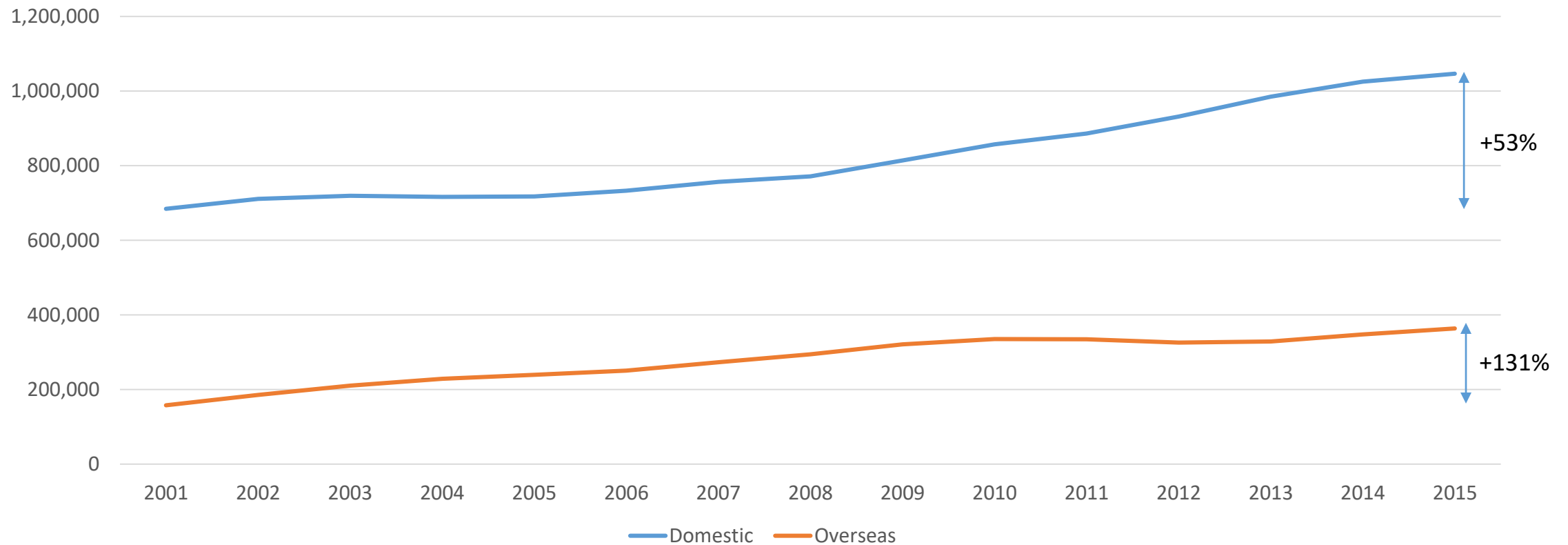
Our institutions

Staff

The public

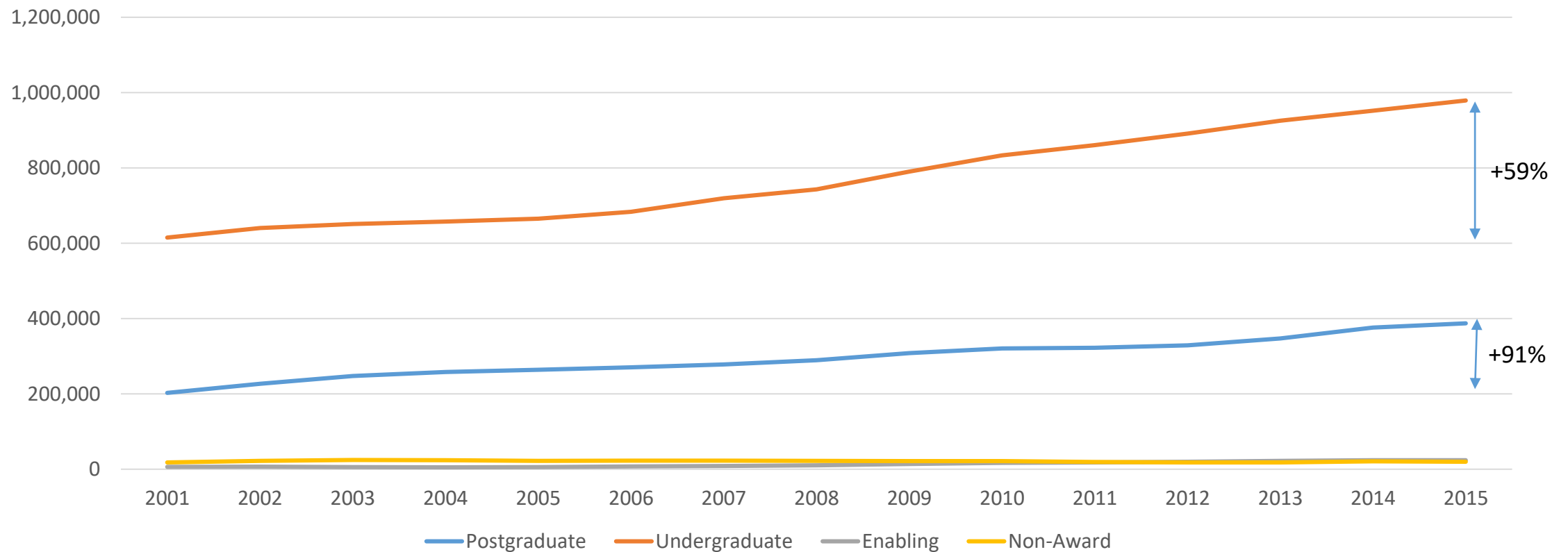
Overseas students have driven the 67 per cent growth in higher education students since 2001

Enrolment count by year at all higher education institutions

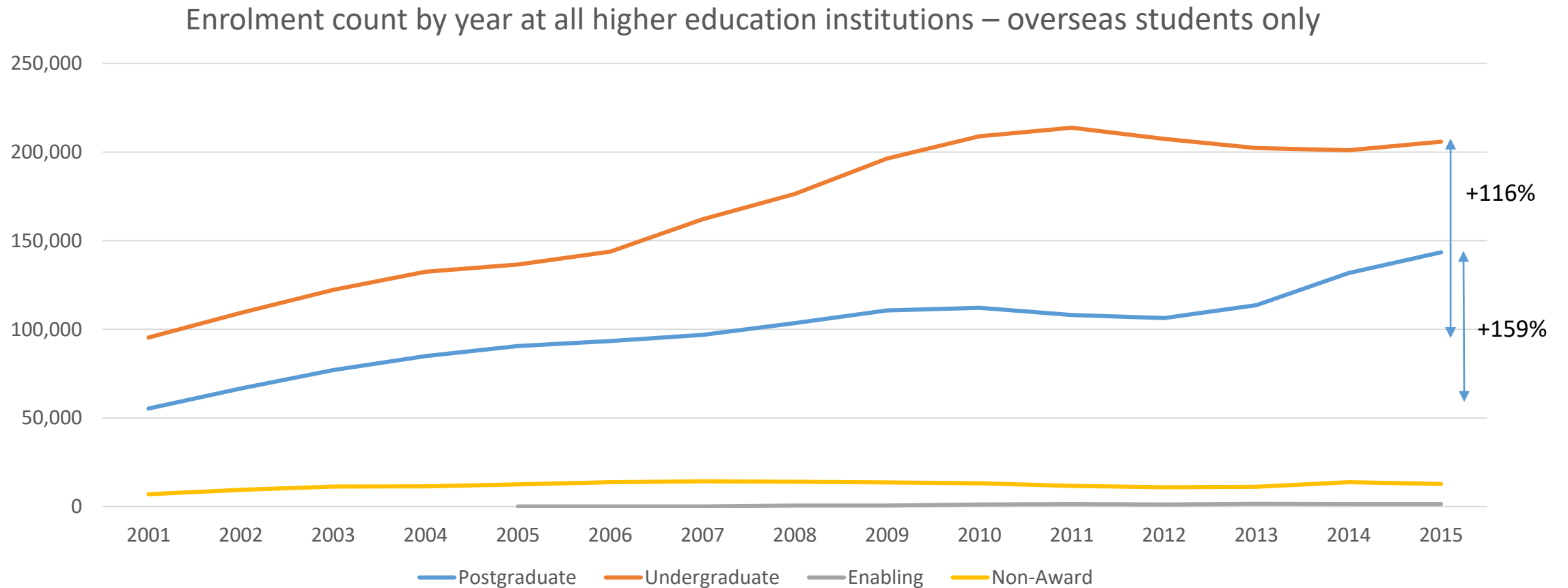


Of our total 1.4M higher education students, nearly 70 per cent are undergraduates

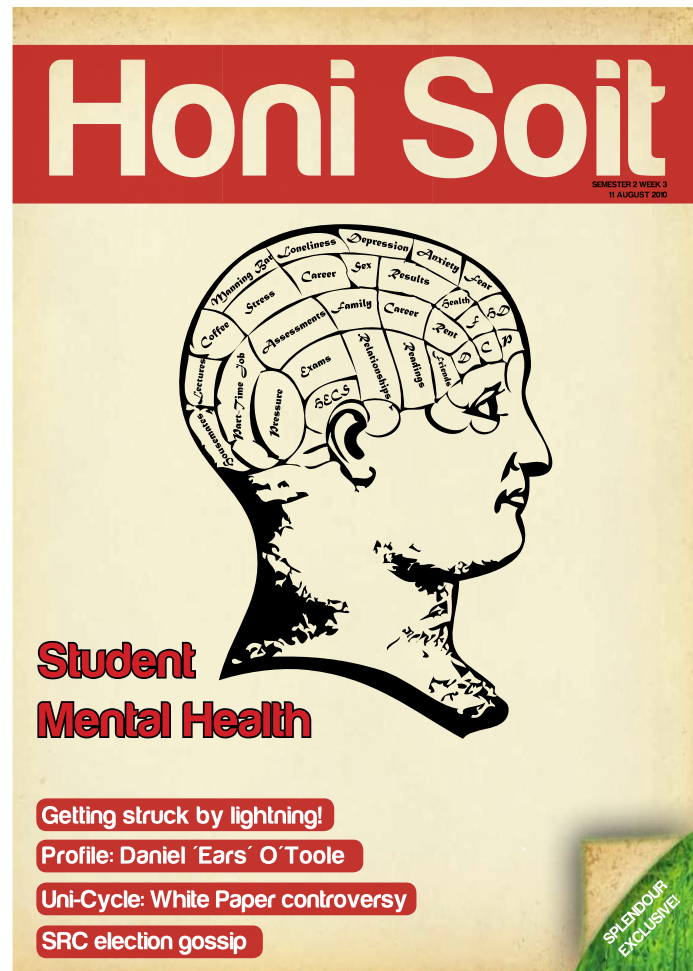
Enrolment count by year by course level at all higher education institutions



However of our 363K overseas students, only 57 per cent are undergraduates



Students have been pleading for more mental health support for many years



Honi Soit
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Winning Soul, Loneliness, Depression, Anxiety, Sex, Results, Career, Family, Career, Stress, Assessments, Relationships, Pressure, ACCS, Crime, Ph.D. Time Job, Coffee, Accidents, Motivation

Student Mental Health

- Getting struck by lightning!
- Profile: Daniel 'Ears' O'Toole
- Uni-Cycle: White Paper controversy
- SRC election gossip

SPLENDOR EXCLUSIVE!



I Am Fine | FM | The Harvard Crimson
http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/2/17/harvard-many-feel-out/

The Harvard Crimson NEWS OPINION MAGAZINE SPORTS ARTS MEDIA FLYBY
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STUDENT INTERNSHIPS NATIONAL CLANDESTINE SERVICE
THE WORK OF A NATION. THE CENTER OF INTELLIGENCE. www.cia.gov

I Am Fine
By ANONYMOUS, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER
Published: Thursday, February 17, 2011

1.8k Like 54 retweet 108 COMMENT EMAIL PRINT

I feel like I should remember the first time I came close to committing suicide, as if it's something along the lines of a first kiss. I guess it should be one of those things that produces a rush of sensory imagery with the slightest trigger. You're meant to remember some soft noise humming in your ear, a faint trembling of the body, a detailed image of what was around you—even though your eyes were closed. It should be one of those moments, the kind that remains vivid even as the rest of your past blurs and fades away; it's the kind that you're supposed to remember, right? I don't.

I can only talk in generalities, what it was like every time I felt like this. There were always tears—lots of them—my shirt wet as they seeped down my cheeks, paused at my chin, dropped to my chest. I would be sitting on my bed, fixated on a single point in the room, my eyesight transitioning in and out of focus. At times I saw everything—my face smiling back at me from glossy pictures on the walls, the days on my hanging calendar, days I never wanted to face—at others, only my thoughts. There was always some reason to feel meaningless. Most importantly, it was always night.

I played out scenarios in my head. My knife was on the top shelf of my bookcase, my fourth-floor window could be easily opened, my roommate wouldn't be back for another hour or so.

Eventually, I would begin to turn the knife over in my hand. It provided no guarantee. What if

MOST READ

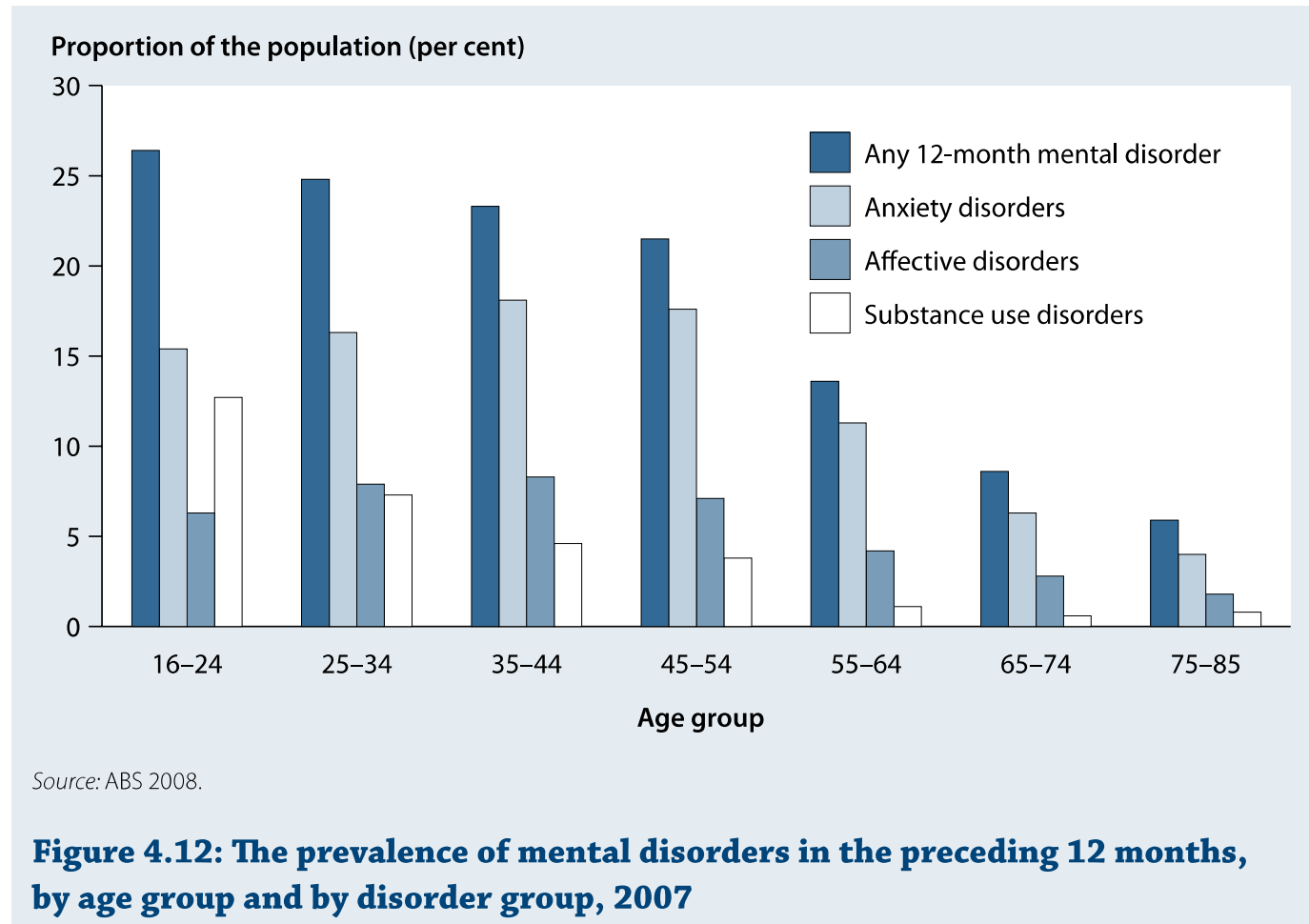
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2. Woman Allegedly Raped in Harvard Yard
3. GSAS Appoints New Dean
4. The Harrowing, Poignant Journey of Frank Ocean
5. Spotted on Plympton Street

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Data support what students are telling us: their age group suffers the highest burden of mental illness



Suicide is now the leading cause of death for 15 to 24-year-olds, far exceeding the road toll

Cause of death, 15-24 years, raw numbers, Australia, 2015



Staff are also an important stakeholder, in several ways

Students

Our institutions

Staff

The public

Our institutions' success is tied to their students' mental health

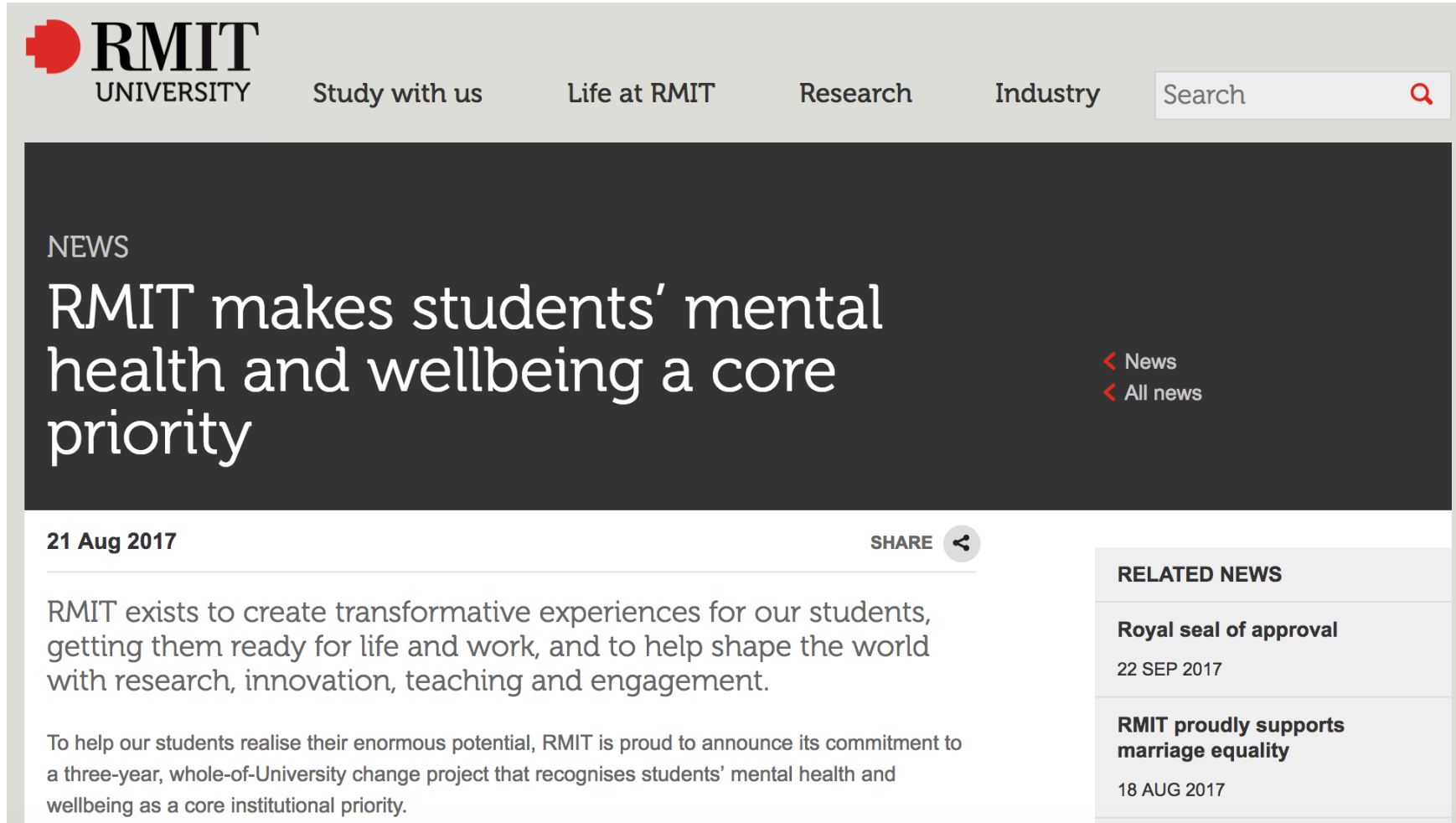
Students

Our institutions

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The public

RMIT University has recently set an industry-leading “tone from the top”



The screenshot shows the RMIT University website's news section. At the top, the RMIT logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Study with us', 'Life at RMIT', 'Research', and 'Industry' are in the center. A search bar is on the right. Below the navigation, the word 'NEWS' is displayed in a dark grey box. The main headline reads 'RMIT makes students' mental health and wellbeing a core priority'. To the right of the headline are two links: '< News' and '< All news'. Below the headline, the date '21 Aug 2017' is on the left, and a 'SHARE' button with a share icon is on the right. The main text of the article begins with 'RMIT exists to create transformative experiences for our students, getting them ready for life and work, and to help shape the world with research, innovation, teaching and engagement.' A second paragraph follows: 'To help our students realise their enormous potential, RMIT is proud to announce its commitment to a three-year, whole-of-University change project that recognises students' mental health and wellbeing as a core institutional priority.' On the right side, there is a 'RELATED NEWS' section with two items: 'Royal seal of approval' dated '22 SEP 2017' and 'RMIT proudly supports marriage equality' dated '18 AUG 2017'.

RMIT UNIVERSITY Study with us Life at RMIT Research Industry Search

NEWS

RMIT makes students' mental health and wellbeing a core priority

< News
< All news

21 Aug 2017 SHARE

RMIT exists to create transformative experiences for our students, getting them ready for life and work, and to help shape the world with research, innovation, teaching and engagement.

To help our students realise their enormous potential, RMIT is proud to announce its commitment to a three-year, whole-of-University change project that recognises students' mental health and wellbeing as a core institutional priority.

RELATED NEWS

Royal seal of approval
22 SEP 2017

RMIT proudly supports marriage equality
18 AUG 2017

The public should also be concerned about students' mental health

Students

Our institutions

Staff

The public

Mental health has been a population-level priority since at least 1996

 Australian Government
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

AIHW Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing

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Health priority areas

 Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions	 Asthma	 Cancer control	 Cardiovascular health
 Diabetes mellitus	 Injury prevention and control	 Mental health	 Obesity

The National Health Priority Areas initiative was Australia's response to the World Health Organisation's global strategy *Health for All by the year 2000* and its subsequent revision.

The initial 1996 set of NHPAs included cardiovascular health, cancer control, injury prevention and control and mental health. Diabetes mellitus was added in 1997, followed by asthma in 1999, arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in 2002 and obesity in 2008.

Mental health is a major public policy issue – not only in Australia, but globally



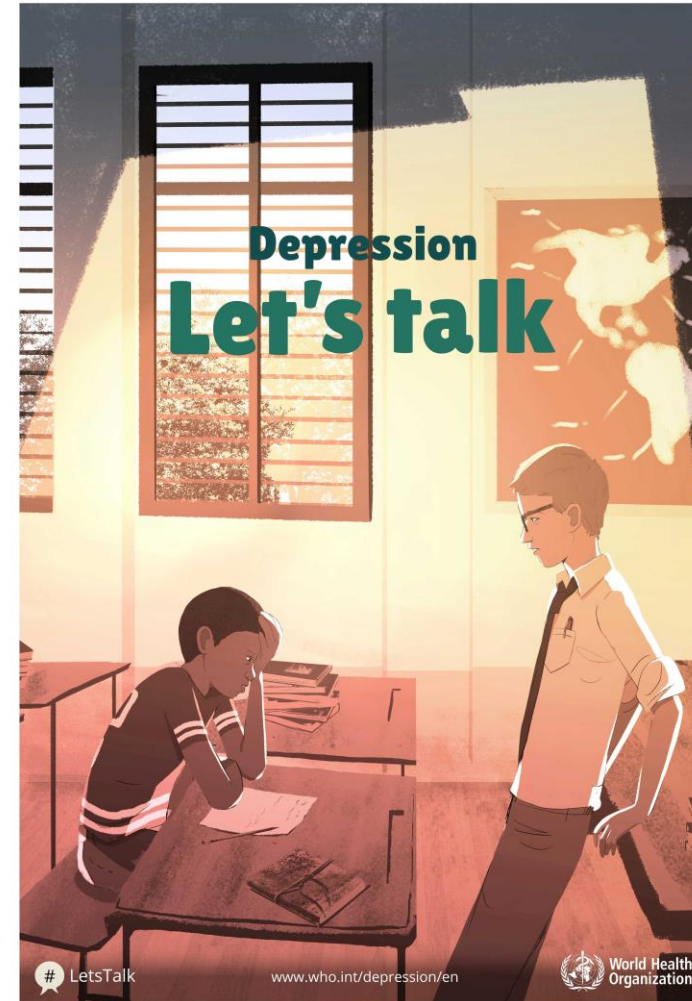
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OF THE WORLD

The Global Economic Burden of Non-communicable Diseases



A report by the World Economic Forum
and the Harvard School of Public Health

September 2011

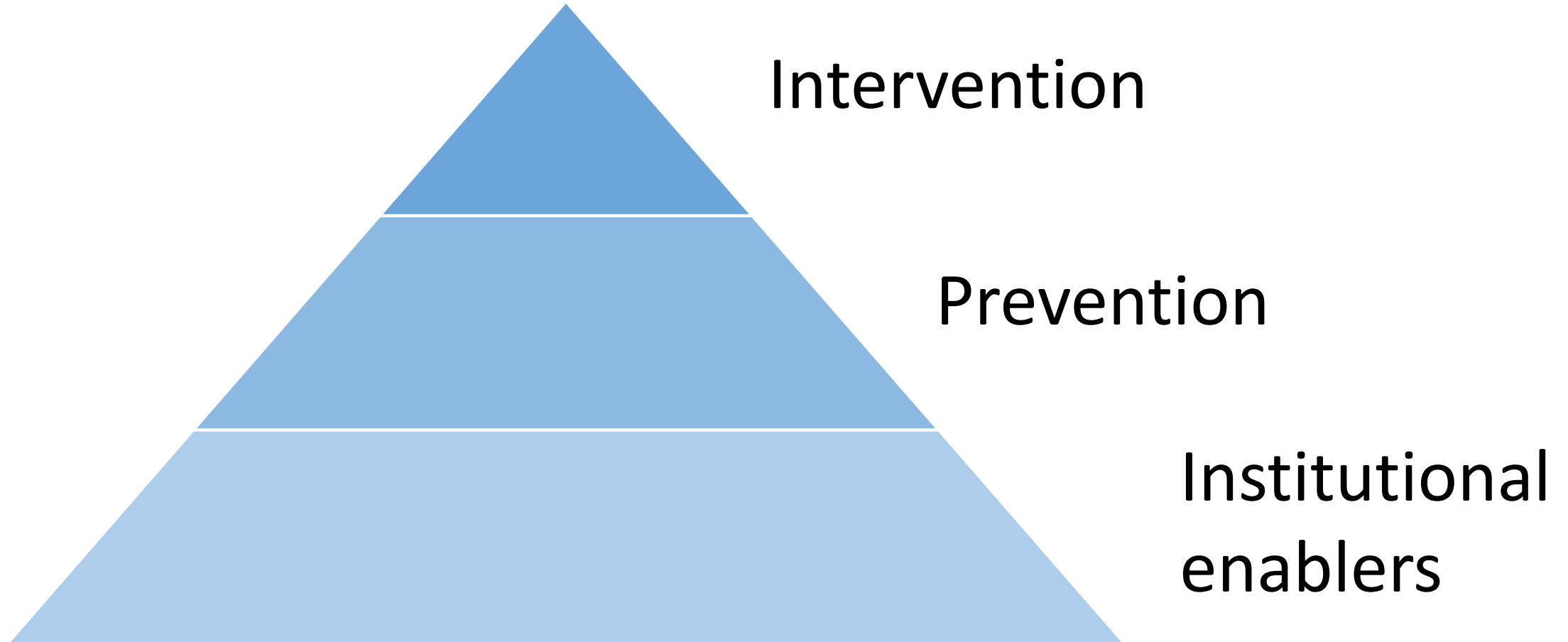


LetsTalk

www.who.int/depression/en



Our approach needs to consider three levels



Each of us has an opportunity (?obligation) to help effect change



A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities

There is a strong and expanding evidence base indicating that university students are a 'very high risk population' for psychological distress and mental disorders, and that the prevalence and severity of mental health difficulties is growing across student populations¹. The research raises a pressing question for administrators and educators: Given that a substantial proportion of students will experience mental health difficulties during their time at university, how can universities ensure they provide supportive and 'health-promoting' environments?

This *Framework for Promoting Student Mental Health and Wellbeing* aims to assist institutions to develop a 'whole-of-university' approach. It identifies key **action areas** for promoting student mental health and wellbeing as well as institutional **enablers** for achieving those actions. For each action, the framework identifies priority activities and possible measures of progress that can be adapted for different university environments, acknowledging that individual institutional approaches will vary according to local contexts and priorities.

Health promoting actions

- 1 Foster engaging curricula and learning experiences
- 2 Cultivate supportive social, physical and digital environments
- 3 Strengthen community awareness and actions
- 4 Develop students' mental health knowledge and self-regulatory skills
- 5 Ensure access to effective services

The five actions individually and together are important in developing a whole-of-institution approach to promoting student mental health and wellbeing. These actions will need to be supported by institutional arrangements that enable:

- 1 Policy development and review processes
- 2 Participation and empowerment of staff and students
- 3 Allocation of appropriate resources and recognition
- 4 Staff professional development

Approach

This Framework draws on three well-known blueprints for health promotion: *The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*², *Healthy Universities in the UK*³ and *Mindmatters*⁴. It was developed through a process of feedback and consultation with higher education researchers, mental health experts, institutional leaders and academic and professional staff from 13 universities.

Figure 1 A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Health and Wellbeing



¹ For example, Stallman, H. (2010); Larcombe et al., (2015); Weiering, Landstedt and Wijn (2013)

² The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion was signed in 1986 at the World Health Organization's First Conference on Health Promotion (see <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>).

³ A healthy university is defined as one that 'aspires to create a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health, wellbeing and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential' (Dooris, Cawson, Doherty & Powell, 2010).

⁴ Healthy Universities is a framework developed in the UK for adopting a health settings approach within the higher education sector (see <http://www.healthyuniversities.ac.uk/>).

⁵ Mindmatters is a highly successful nationwide initiative focused specifically on mental health in secondary schools (see www.mindmatters.edu.au/).

