



Office of the Public Advocate

# Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan

2020-2022



# Diversity Statement

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) is a human rights organisation that promotes the diversity and inclusion of all people.

This is reflected in its mission for a just and inclusive society that respects and promotes the dignity and human rights of all people.

To enable that vision to be implemented, OPA staff and volunteers support people with disability and mental illness and promote and protect their rights. OPA's values of respect and compassion, integrity, rights and independence reflect and underpin its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

OPA respects the diverse range of life experiences, skills, abilities, cultural backgrounds and knowledge that staff, volunteers and clients bring to their interactions with it and understand that one size does not fit all. A diverse environment supports flexibility and adaptability.

OPA is committed to being inclusive and ensuring that everyone we interact with feels valued, respected and heard. OPA strives to empower all people to contribute and participate.

OPA's *Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2019-2022* sets out how, over the next four years, it will demonstrate its commitment to supporting staff, volunteers and clients in an inclusive way.

The framework consists of five plans that seek to address the barriers that prevent some people who may face multiple disadvantages from accessing OPA's services, or contributing to the organisation as staff or volunteers. These plans are:

- Disability Action Plan
- Gender Equality Action Plan
- Cultural Action Plan
- Koori Inclusion Action Plan
- LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan.

Each plan contains four key strategies to facilitate a common focus and direction. These are:

- systemic inclusion
- data and service improvement
- employment and economic participation
- community education and partnerships.

OPA strives to be a best practice organisation by creating a welcoming and inclusive culture. The strategies, goals and actions outlined in this framework ensure that its work and culture is inclusive of all members of the Victorian community that it serves in line with its human rights vision.

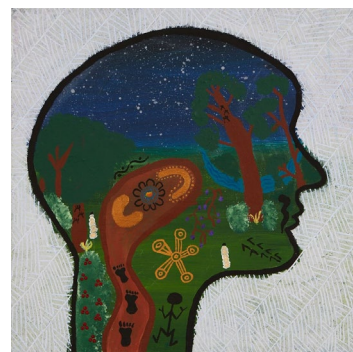
## Mental Health and Wellbeing Statement

Ensuring that all staff and volunteers feel that they are healthy at OPA is a critical part of feeling safe and included in the workplace. Accordingly, OPA has developed this *Mental Health & Wellbeing Plan 2020-2022*.

While OPA's Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee will ensure its implementation, we are all responsible every day for our colleagues' health and wellbeing. The work we do and the way we promote it, aligns with our commitment to health and wellbeing.

I thank the committee for its hard work developing the plan and I encourage you to read it carefully and keep it handy. I look forward to celebrating reaching key milestones of the plan with you all.

Colleen Pearce  
**Public Advocate**



### About the artwork

*Loving the Land*, 2020  
Acrylic on canvas  
Artist: Narnz

### Artist's Story

This is me dreaming of going camping with my children and siblings, enjoying looking at the stars, loving the land, spotting bush animals, sharing stories around the campfire, making deadly camp bush feeds, teaching and learning about bush tucker.

# Improve the understanding of mental health at OPA

What will we do?	What will success look like?	Responsibility	Timeline
Make staff aware of the work of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee and invite staff to contribute work on the plan.	<p>Staff are informed and educated about the plan through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff induction</li> <li>• all staff meetings</li> <li>• all staff emails.</li> </ul> <p>Staff are invited by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee to contribute.</p>	Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee Communications Unit	As appropriate
Provide staff with information about mental health.	Staff are provided with information (training and access to information) about the signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions, suicide risk, self-care advice, positive coping strategies and resilience.	Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee	Ongoing
Ensure staff and managers are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding mental health in the workplace, including legal obligations.	<p><b>Code of conduct for the Victorian Public Sector</b></p> <p>Public sector employees follow the spirit as well as the letter of the law relating to discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. Public sector employees create an environment that is free of discrimination, harassment and bullying. Valuing and promoting diversity is an important element of demonstrating respect.</p> <p><b>Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004</b></p> <p>Section 23 Duties of employers to other persons</p> <p>(1) An employer must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons other than employees of the employer are not exposed to risks to their health or safety arising from the conduct of the undertaking of the employer.</p> <p>Section 25 Duties of employees</p> <p>(1) While at work, an employee must</p> <p>(a) take reasonable care for his or her own health and safety; and</p> <p>(b) take reasonable care for the health and safety of persons who may be affected by the employee's acts or omissions at a workplace; and</p> <p>(c) co-operate with his or her employer with respect to any action taken by the employer to comply with a requirement imposed by or under this Act or the regulations.</p>	<p>All-staff meetings</p> <p>Leaders' Forum</p> <p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Leadership meeting</p>	Annually

# Promote positive mental health and wellbeing

Make OPA a more engaging, cohesive and effective workplace

What will we do?	What will success look like?	Responsibility	Timeline
Promote mental health and wellbeing events and encourage open dialogue in the workplace about mental health issues.	<p>Marking events such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Mental Health Week</li> <li>• World Mental Health Day</li> <li>• R U OK? Day</li> <li>• WorkSafe Health and Safety Month</li> </ul> <p>will affirm the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.</p>	<p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee</p> <p>Communications Unit</p>	Promote one event per financial year
Create an environment that is supportive to everyone at OPA and promote physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.	<p>The Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee (through fundraising) and other groups will arrange functions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all staff lunches</li> <li>• Connexions Program</li> <li>• other inclusive events.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee</p> <p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Leaders' Forum</p> <p>Communications Unit</p>	Ongoing
Provide supportive supervision.	<p>OPA will have a cohesive supervision policy providing guidance to supervisors and managers</p> <p>Opportunities for external supervision and mentoring will be explored (as a first step, through what is available to VPS staff).</p>	Leaders' Forum	2021

What will we do?	What will success look like?	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>Consider factors impacting on the mental health and wellbeing of staff.</p>	<p>Review of work and organisational design factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development Plan goals</li> <li>• workload</li> <li>• role clarity</li> <li>• job control, including flexible working arrangements</li> <li>• work allocation</li> <li>• resources, including training</li> <li>• skill development</li> <li>• individual factors</li> <li>• new working environments related to remote working (due to COVID-19)</li> <li>• respect, trust and equity.</li> </ul> <p>The review will take new legislation and organisational structures into consideration.</p>	<p>Leaders' Forum</p> <p>Remote Working Taskforce</p> <p>Consultative Committee</p> <p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Consider operational factors that impact on staff such as occupational violence and other risk factors.</p>	<p>OPA provides information and training in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing Aggressive Behaviours (security and incident management plan training)</li> <li>• all-of-office risks reflected in OPA Risk Assessment</li> <li>• dealing with angry clients</li> <li>• dealing with challenging behaviour (Victorian Ombudsman).</li> </ul>	<p>Education and Training Committee</p> <p>Staff Consultative Committee</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

# Protect the mental health and wellbeing of OPA staff at all levels

Identify, prevent, and respond to identified risks by compliance, increased awareness and capacity

What will we do?	What will success look like?	Responsibility	Timeline
Survey staff to identify areas of potential risk in relation to stress.	Committee will use feedback from OPA All-staff Survey (February 2021 and every two years) to address concerns raised.	Quality and Audit	February 2021
Support staff in the workplace.	<p>OPA has in place supports including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace Contact Officers (WCO). Details of WCOs and their role will be revived and promoted on OPAnet and through the all-staff email</li> <li>• staff may approach a manager or supervisor with any concerns, and in turn, managers take time to check in on individual staff wellbeing in supervision</li> <li>• other avenues for staff to raise mental health and wellbeing concerns include the Remote Working Taskforce the Consultative Committee</li> <li>• staff can access the Employee Assistance Program provided by Converge International 24/7.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee</p> <p>Workplace Contact Officers</p> <p>Leaders' Forum</p>	Ongoing
Inform staff of the many avenues available to them to obtain mental health support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incoming staff are made aware of the above programs and contact points in the staff induction</li> <li>• The above are mentioned at the launch of this plan</li> <li>• The above are made available on OPAnet</li> </ul>	<p>Leadership Team</p> <p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee</p> <p>Communications Unit</p>	Ongoing
Support staff to raise any concerns about stress, workload or mental health.	OPA Staff Consultative Committee has representative from all programs across OPA. Inform staff, through their representative, that they may raise issues to be brought to the Consultative Committee.	Consultative Committee	Ongoing

# Support all staff in their mental health and wellbeing

Provide access to mental health supports for all staff including those with mental health conditions

What will we do?	What will success look like?	Responsibility	Timeline
Ensure the physical working environment is supportive of wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communal spaces and spaces for staff to retreat are available</li> <li>• Wellbeing room, lockers and social communal areas are kept in good condition.</li> </ul>	Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee	Ongoing
Employee wellbeing and support.	<p>OPA has in place Converge International to provide support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employee assistance</li> <li>• career assistance</li> <li>• conflict assistance</li> <li>• nutrition and lifestyle assistance</li> <li>• manager assistance</li> <li>• money assistance</li> <li>• legal assistance</li> </ul>	Corporate Services Communications Unit	Ongoing
Respond to identified risks in the workplace and in the field.	All-of-office risks identified (with control measures) are reflected in OPA Risk Assessment	Consultative Committee	Ongoing
Staff are supported in times of change or uncertainty.	<p>Staff will be provided with the tools they need to be able to perform their role remotely.</p> <p>There is ongoing communication and open dialogue and staff are clear on where they can raise issues.</p>	Leaders' Forum Remote Working Taskforce	Ongoing



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**Office of the Public Advocate**

Level 1, 204 Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053

Tel: 1300 309 337

NRS: 133 677

Fax: 1300 787 510

[www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au](http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au)