Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People
in South Australia

Dashboard and Indicators
Fact Sheet

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Dashboard for Young People

The rising incidence of mental health conditions in Australia emphasises a need for preventative measures and a better understanding of the associated risk factors, especially as it relates to setting up our young people for future mental wellbeing.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Dashboard for Young People is a vital tool designed to provide a simple and accessible framework for understanding the mental health and wellbeing of young people. The Dashboard of Mental Health and Wellbeing of South Australia's Young People is structured into five domains, each containing a set of key indicators (Figure 1).

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Dashboard for Young People distils a broad range of potential mental health and wellbeing indicators into a dashboard or indicators and sub-indicators that can be tracked over time. These indicators are sensitive to change and can accurately reflect the mental health and wellbeing experiences of young South Australians.

This targeted approach promotes a holistic view of mental health by ensuring that the critical factors affecting young people's wellbeing are addressed while also deepening our understanding of their complex interplay. In doing so, it provides a blueprint for intervention strategies aimed at prevention.

The 5 Domains and Indicators

Domain	Main indicators
Domain 1: Social Determinants	Family SES (wealth and income equity) (2 sub-indicators) — Social support/network (3 sub-indicators) — Educational attainment (2 sub-indicators)
Domain 2: Mental Wellbeing	Optimism (3 sub-indicators) — Happiness (2 sub-indicators) — Self-esteem
Domain 3: Individual risks and protective factors	Healthy lifestyle — Media use and influence — Sleep quality
Domain 4 : Impacts of critical events (global and local)	Global events (3 sub-indicators) — Local events (3 sub-indicators)
Domain 5: Mental health conditions and utilisation of mental health care	Prevalence of mental disorders (3 sub-indicators) — Inpatient: Utilisation of child and youth psychiatry: treatment and services (1 sub-indicator)

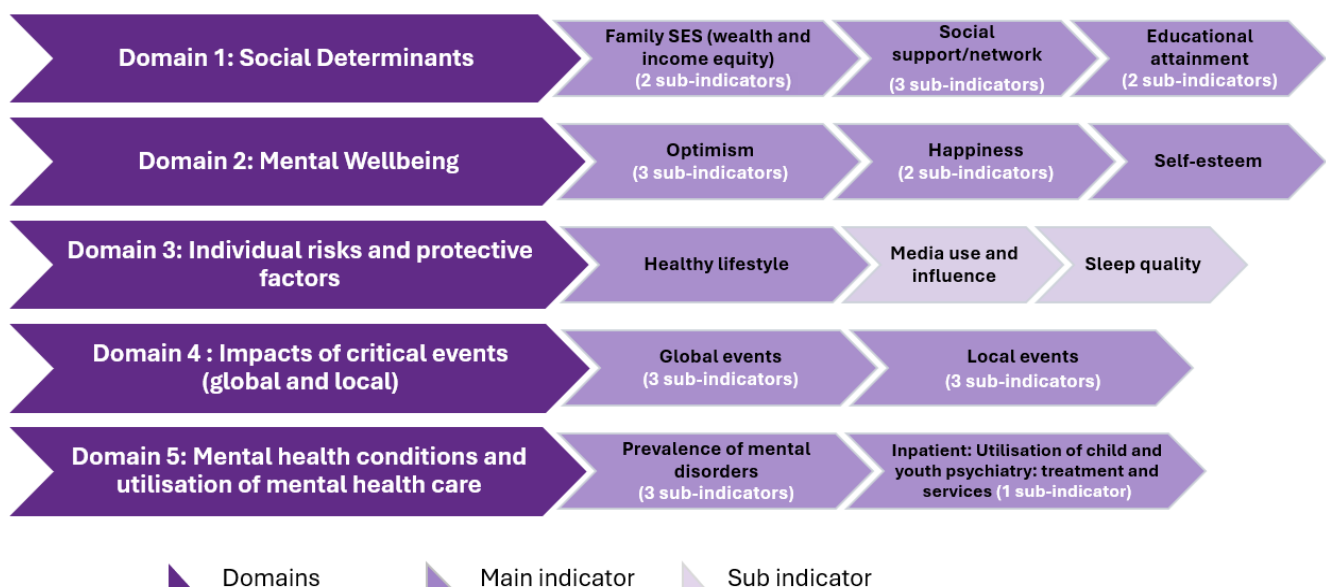▶ Domains   ▶ Main indicator   ▶ Sub indicator

Figure 1: The Dashboard of Mental Health and Wellbeing of South Australia's Young People (2024)
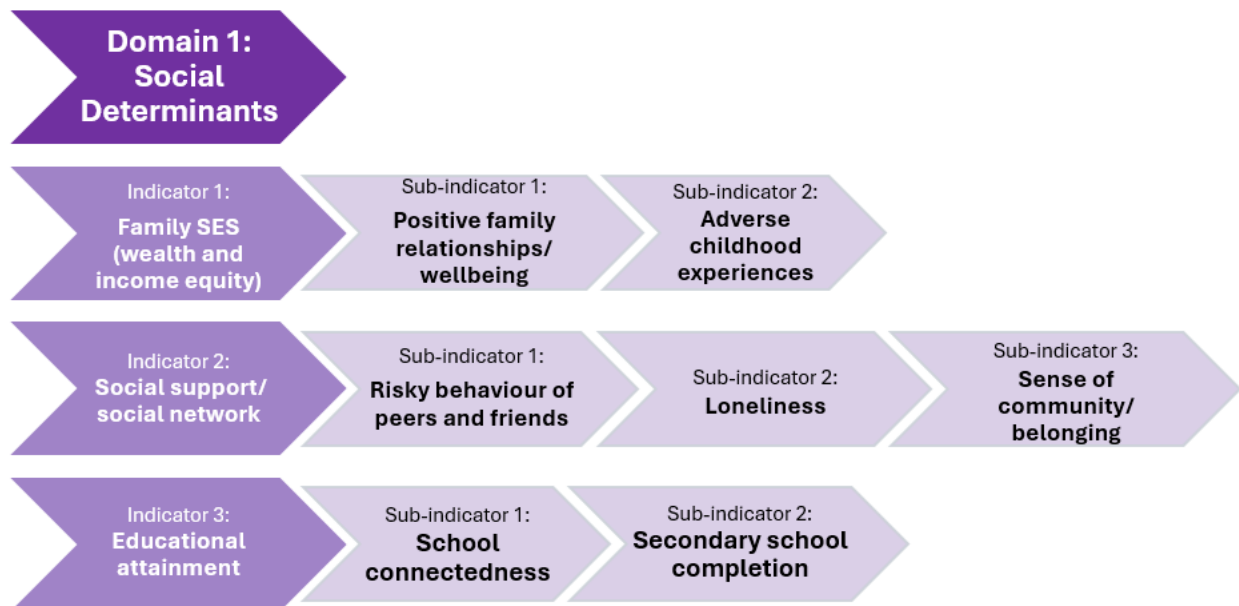
Domain 1: Social Determinants

Figure 2: Domain 1: Social Determinants

- Economic adversity impacts mental health across the life course: poverty negatively affects neurodevelopment and the mental health of children, increases the risk of mental illness in adulthood, and is linked to a higher likelihood of psychosis later in life.

- The quality of family relationships, including social support (e.g., providing love, advice, and care) and strain (e.g., arguments, being critical, making too many demands), can influence well-being through psychosocial, behavioural, and physiological pathways.

- Negative peer influence, isolation and lack of peer relationships, is a risk factor for antisocial and problematic behaviours, and is also often blamed for risky behaviours (Rohrbeck & Garvin 2014, AIHW 2021).

- Not completing secondary school increases the risk of social exclusion, disability, and isolation.

- The effects of low income are linked to lower quality of life, higher rates of illness and disease, limited access to healthcare, greater psychological distress, and unhealthy behaviours, including substance abuse and involvement in criminal activities. (Bowman et al., 2016).
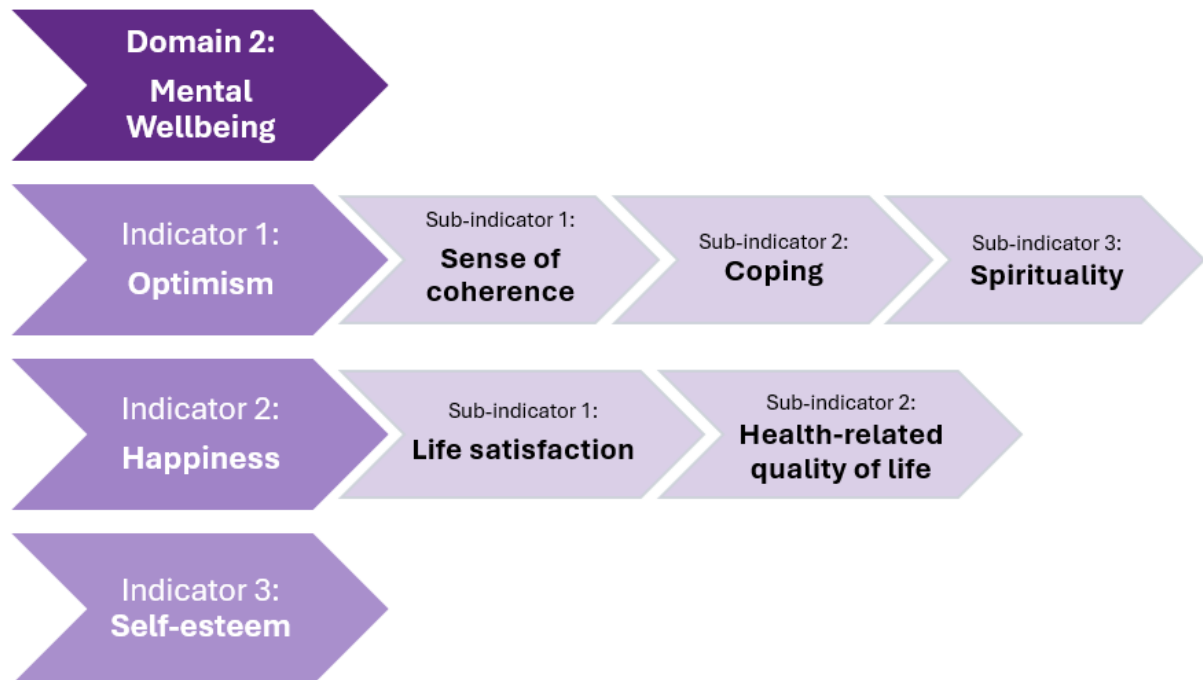
Domain 2: Mental Wellbeing

Figure 3: Domain 2: Mental Wellbeing

- Positive emotions and behaviours are linked to success and are associated with the trait of happiness. Happiness reflects mental integrity, and there is a strong connection between happiness and the psychological health of adolescents. Adolescents who report feeling happy tend to perform better in school and achieve greater success in life (Heizomi et al., 2015).

- Optimistic individuals are positive about events in daily life. Optimistic subjects tend to have more frequently protective attitudes, are more resilient to stress and are inclined to use more appropriate coping strategies.

- Self-esteem is related to a person's ability to hold a favourable attitude towards oneself, and to retain such positive beliefs in situations that are challenging, especially situations that include being evaluated by others.
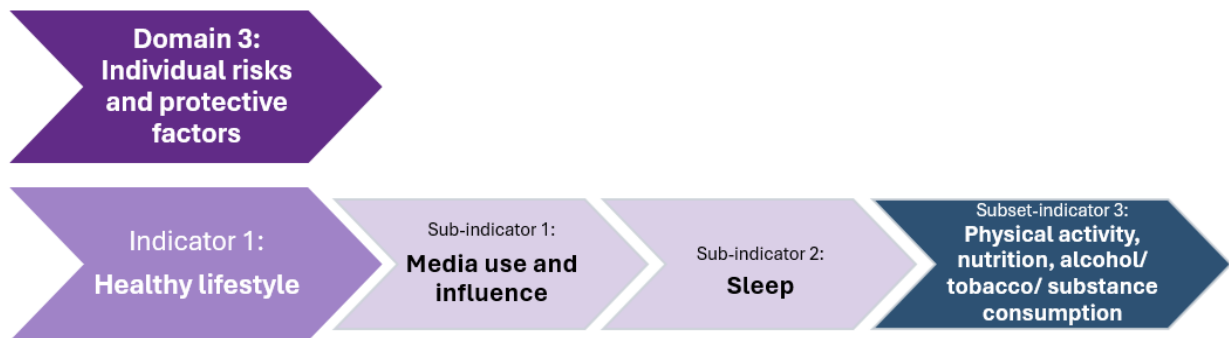
Domain 3: Individual Risks and Protective Factors

Figure 4: Domain 3: Individual Risks and Protective Factors

** Figure 4 highlights the flagged indicator in **dark blue**, indicating that active tracking is already underway for this measure.*

- A healthy lifestyle has been shown to be advantageous for many reasons, such as weight regulation, happiness and wellbeing, and to reduce the personal, societal, and economic consequences of lifestyle-related illness and disease.

- Several modifiable risk and protective factors of mental health have been identified in adolescents:
    - sufficient sleep and physical activity and a healthy diet were associated with better mental health outcomes, such as lower depression, anxiety, stress and higher self-esteem
    - high alcohol consumption and smoking were associated with less beneficial mental health outcomes, such as higher psychological distress, depression, anxiety, stress, and lower self-esteem (Maenhout et al., 2020).

- The significant relationship between excessive social media use and poor sleep quality, daily dysfunction, sleep disorder and depression are worthy of awareness.

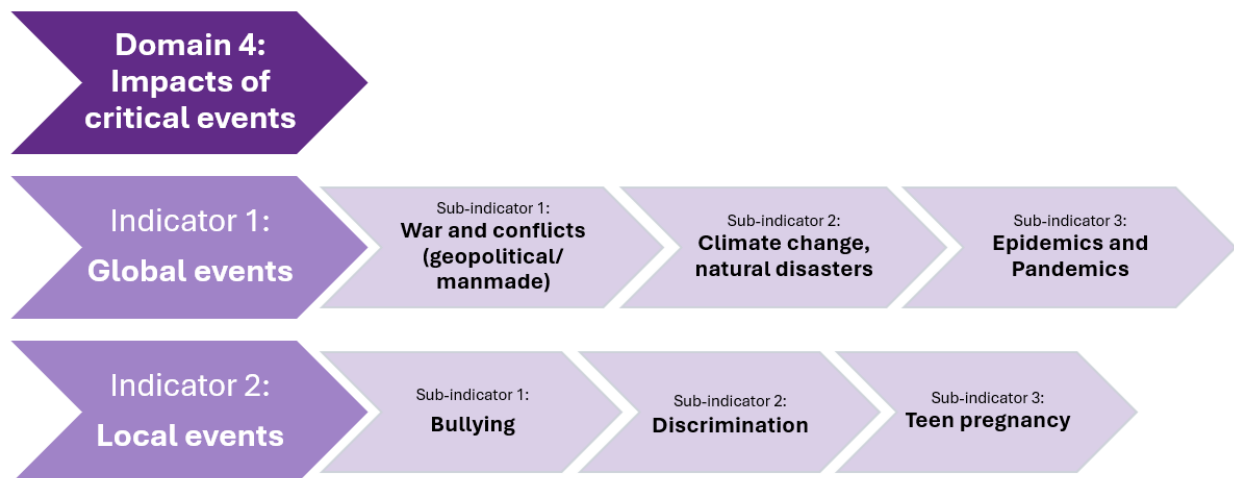# Domain 4: Impacts of Critical Events

Figure 5: Domain 4: Impacts of Critical Events

- Critical life events have a significant impact on the psychological and mental state of young individuals while the absence of critical life events was associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which are indicative of better mental health.

- Certain events can disrupt a person's normal functioning balance, especially if they occur repeatedly and unexpectedly, which has adverse consequences on the mental health of individuals (Feinstein, 2021).

- People who are bullied are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems, headaches, and struggling to adjust to school. Bullying can also have long-term negative impacts on self-esteem.

- Children and adolescents who bully others are more likely to face substance abuse issues, academic difficulties, and may display violent behaviour later in life.

- Adolescent parenthood is associated with several negative consequences for young mothers, such as mental health problems like depression, substance abuse, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Teen mothers are also at a higher risk of living in poverty and are more likely to reside in communities and families facing social and economic hardships.

Domain 5:
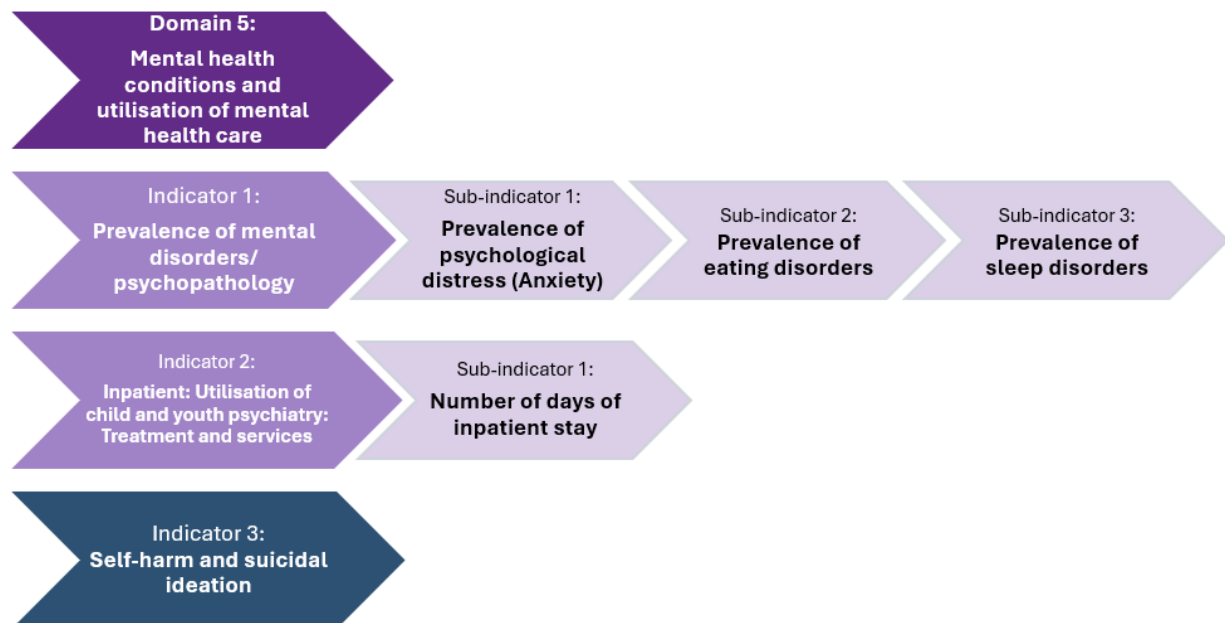## Mental Health Conditions and Utilisation of Mental Health Care

Figure 6: Domain 5: Mental Health Conditions and Utilisation of Mental Health Care

*The Dashboard highlights the flagged indicator in **dark blue**, indicating that active tracking is already underway for this measure.*

- Mental disorders can have profound effects on a person's life, leading to worse educational performance, higher unemployment rates, and deteriorating physical health. In severe cases, conditions like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia can result in self-harm or even suicide (McDaid et al., 2017).

- Adolescents with longer length of inpatient stay are often linked to not living with their biological parents and having a family history of mental illness, legal problems, and substance abuse.

7 Indicators to Track (condensed version)

The proposed condensed version of the Dashboard of Mental Health and Wellbeing Indicators for Young People is a streamlined instrument designed to guide efforts aimed at fostering healthier, cross-generational communities. The Dashboard's objectives support the broader goal of leading evidence-based, innovative, and integrated actions to prevent and reduce the impact of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including mental health issues, while promoting health equity.

It tracks seven key indicators over time and will help inform the development of targeted prevention strategies for population-based interventions to address emerging trends and gaps in mental health and wellbeing among young people.
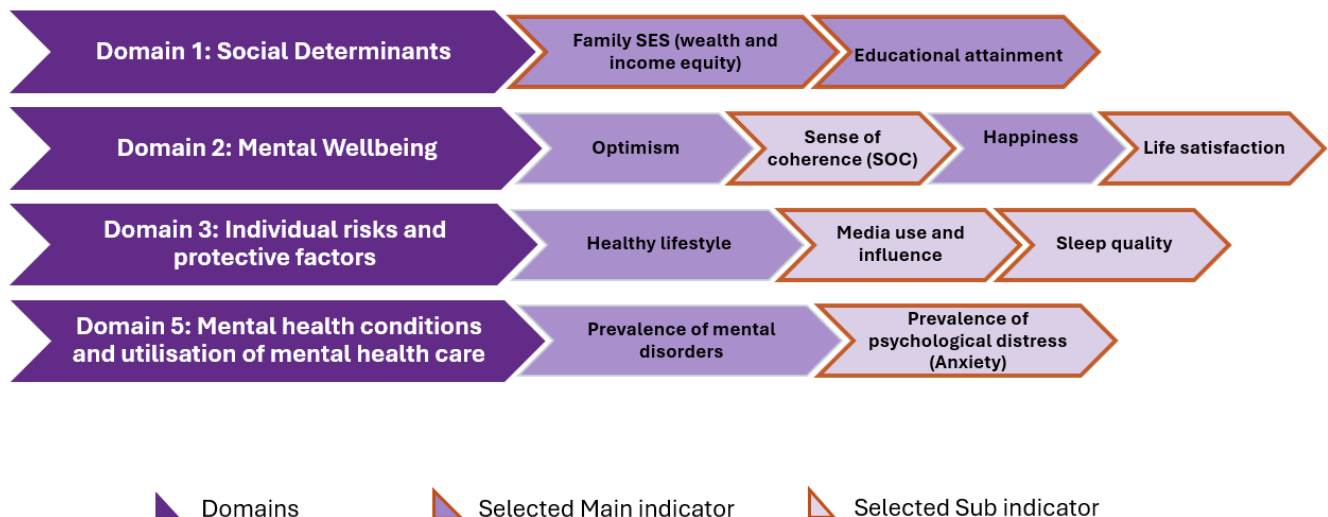
7 Indicators to track (condensed)

Figure 7: The 7 indicators selected out of the complete Dashboard (The Mental Health and Wellbeing Dashboard for Young People, 2024), highlighted in orange borders

This fact sheet has been based off the *Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People in South Australia; a Dashboard of Indicators Report* (2024), written for Preventative Health SA by the Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation (CHiAPRT).

References

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Maenhout L, Peuters C, Cardon G, Compernolle S, Crombez G, DeSmet A. The association of healthy lifestyle behaviors with mental health indicators among adolescents of different family affluence in Belgium. BMC Public Health. 2020 Jun 18;20(1).