



An environmental scan summary:

Australian aged care mental health and wellbeing resources

This report describes the methods and findings of the original environmental scan conducted in July 2022. The scan was re-run in September 2024 and resulted in additional reports about older people accessing mental health services being added to the Resource Collection. We will continue to repeat the scan process at scheduled intervals to ensure content currency.

Key Points

- A desktop environmental scan was undertaken to identify Australian resources on the mental health and wellbeing of older Australians receiving aged care.
- The scan relied on Google Advanced search strategies as well as targeted searches of key organisational websites for items of relevance and potential use to the aged care sector workforce.
- Items were selected for further examination if they met the eligibility criteria and most of the quality requirements set out by the AACODS checklist (n=72).
- A final set of 33 resources was created which includes toolkits, guidance, videos, e-learning modules for staff working providing residential or home care.

Background

This multidimensional topic was nominated as a priority issue for the aged care workforce based on a survey of the sector. However, the survey did not delve into the reasons why this issue was problematic. Its selection might reflect the workforce's commitment to maintaining or boosting the psychological and emotional wellbeing of older people. It might equally convey a concern for managing older people with mental health conditions.

An environmental scan of current Australian information and resources would not only help create a repository of relating to the mental health and wellbeing of people in receipt of aged care. The environmental scan was an opportunity to see how the issue is being represented in existing high-quality training and educational resources.

Methods

We undertook an inductive approach to identifying resources covering both mental health conditions and positive psychological wellbeing in aged care settings. Search terms were kept as broad and inclusive as possible to capture resources across the full mental health and wellbeing spectrum.

Search strategy

The scan adopted a two-pronged approach to the search.

Google Advanced searches

Structured searches for Australian aged care resources with a focus on mental health and/or wellbeing were conducted July 11-15, 2022. Concepts and their descriptive terms included:

- Aged care, residential care, nursing home, home care
- Mental health, wellbeing, well-being, positive psychology, psychological, emotional, psychiatric, depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, mental illness, mental disorder, mental condition.

Terms were tried in different combinations using the Advanced Search feature of Google. This advanced option offers the ability to limit a search to information held on websites with specific characteristics. These include:

- Sites based in Australia
- Sites for non-commercial organisations (.org.au), those affiliated with government (.gov.au), or Australian educational organisations, including universities (.edu.au)
- PDF resources.

Organisational websites

To not rely solely on Google's ability to identify resources, we also looked more deeply and methodically at the websites of major Australian health and social care organisations. Organisations were added to this list if they were peak bodies for mental health (e.g., Beyond Blue) or organisations representing mental health professionals (e.g., Australian Psychological Society). Those who had made a submission on the mental health of older people to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety were also of interest.

Eligibility criteria

Resources were considered for inclusion if they:

- Were produced in Australia for an Australian audience
- Had applicability to the aged care workforce
- Contained informative, educational, or instructional content based on evidence (where applicable)
- Demonstrated strong author or sponsoring organisation credentials
- Were current (i.e., were produced 2018 onwards unless currency was not relevant)
- Were stable resources.

Results

The environmental scan identified 72 websites with content that required further scrutiny. Of these, 33 resources were included in the final set. Many of these were provided by the Commonwealth Government Department of Health (and Aged Care), Australian Psychological Society, Relationships Australia, Beyond Blue, and Mental Health Australia. Item types include toolkits, guidance, videos, and e-learning modules for use by staff in both home and residential aged care. Regularly scheduled scans for new resources will also ensure the content is kept up to date.

These resources can now be browsed via the ARIIA website. Navigate to Knowledge and Implementation Hub Resources page and select 'mental health and wellbeing' in the drop-down box.

Conclusion

The scan found few resources focused on concepts of wellbeing and positive mental health relevant to the aged care setting in Australia. Most resources were concerned with the mental health problems of older Australians in residential aged care, alongside their difficulties accessing psychological services to the same extent as people living in their own homes. Many Primary Health Network (PHN) websites were retrieved but not included. These were announcing localised psychological in-reach programs to residential aged services commissioned with government funding since the findings of the Royal Commission. It was not always clear if these programs were time-limited or intended to be ongoing.

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ARIIA was established as an independent, not-for-profit organisation, set up to lead the advancement of the aged care workforce capability by promoting and facilitating innovation and research to improve the quality of aged care for all Australians.

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