

## A review summary:

# Mental health and wellbeing in aged care

## Key points

- A scoping review of systematic reviews identified 134 reviews published since 2012 on the mental health and wellbeing of people receiving aged care services.
- The key 'themes' that emerged from the literature include depression, anxiety, mental health and dementia, screening tools, suicidal thoughts and self-harm, ceasing to drive, medication use, physical activity, psychological approaches, and reminiscence approaches.
- Most reviews were concerned with measuring how well interventions changed the level of depression or its symptoms in people living in residential aged care.

## Background

Mental health and wellbeing are important components of overall health. They impact how we feel, think, behave, respond to stress, and relate to others. In older adulthood, people may be more likely to experience major life events that impact their mental health, for example, physical illness, loss of a partner, or a change in their living arrangements. [1] In Australia, between 10 and 15 per cent of older adults have depression and approximately 10 per cent have anxiety overall. [1] Mental health conditions are more common among people living in residential aged care than older people living in the community. [2] Researchers are working to understand more about mental health and wellbeing in older adulthood. To understand the scope of this research, we are currently undertaking a scoping review on mental health and wellbeing within the aged care context. As there are a great number of primary studies related to mental health and wellbeing, we have restricted the focus of the review to systematic reviews of primary studies. Targeting existing syntheses helps us identify the subject areas and outcomes already well researched and indicate mental health and wellbeing concerns that have received less attention in primary studies (i.e., the evidence 'gaps').

This review has determined our evidence themes—short summaries of the available research—on this topic for the aged care workforce.

## Objectives of this review

Improving the skills and knowledge of people providing care to aged care recipients requires an understanding of the existing evidence of what works to optimise mental health and wellbeing.

The purpose of this scoping review of the published systematic review literature was to gauge the size, breadth, and nature of the research evidence on mental health and wellbeing within the aged care context. We were especially interested in the range and types of interventions already tested, outcomes of interest to researchers, and the general quality of the evidence. The rest of this document summarises our initial findings of the scoping review.

## Methods

A search strategy was created in Ovid Medline and then translated for Ovid PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Scopus in July 2022. The strategy included a wide range of terms covering wellbeing domains and states of mental health. The search was limited to English language systematic reviews published since 2012. A librarian assisted by conducting a search for grey literature on the topic, as well as iterative searches of Google Scholar. All citations retrieved were uploaded into Covidence for dual screening. Titles and abstracts were screened first, followed by full-text articles for those items thought to be relevant, or where the two reviewers were not in agreement on eligibility.



## Inclusion criteria

Eligible reviews were those that:

- Included older adults
- Focused on mental health and wellbeing outcomes
- Measured outcomes quantitatively or using mixed methods
- Were in the English language
- Were published between 2012 and June 21, 2022
- Documented their processes for reducing bias, including a comprehensive and replicable search strategy and a formal critical appraisal of their included studies
- If the review was about an intervention approach, this approach must be one that is feasibly implemented by an aged care service.

## Keeping evidence themes current

The evidence themes on this topic will be kept current via regular, scheduled updates. Newly published systematic reviews are routinely identified as part of our process for creating the [ARIIA review collection](#). This involves monthly searches of Google Scholar and the Medline (OVID) and CINAHL databases using a broad search strategy for retrieving reviews set in an aged care context (home care and residential aged care). The [PubMed version](#) of this search strategy is available on the [ARIIA review collection page](#).

All reviews relevant to our priority topics are checked against the review collection's eligibility criteria. Those that meet these criteria are included in the ARIIA review collection under the appropriate topic heading. In updating the original scoping review, systematic reviews under the heading of mental health and wellbeing were analysed to determine their relevance to the existing evidence themes. If relevant, their findings and conclusions were mapped against those of individual evidence themes. Newer reviews might therefore lead to:

- Additional findings being added to a theme
- Strengthening a theme's existing findings
- The theme's overall conclusions being revised based on a change in the direction or strength of the more recent evidence, or
- A new evidence theme being written.

## Results

The searches retrieved 1439 reviews for screening. These citations were reviewed independently by the two authors of this review summary and included or excluded from the results set based on their eligibility according to the inclusion criteria. This process created a final set of 134 systematic reviews for analysis. See Figure 1 for the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart. The relevant data from each review was extracted in duplicate by the two authors and used to inform this report. The themes we identified from the final papers include:

- Anxiety
- Ceasing to drive
- Depression
- Medication use
- Mental health and dementia
- Psychological approaches
- Physical activity
- Reminiscence approaches
- Screening tools
- Suicidal thoughts and self-harm

## Outcomes of concern to researchers

The outcomes being measured or assessed by these systematic reviews vary widely and invite discussion on what can be considered relevant to 'mental health and wellbeing'. For example, to what extent are quality of life, happiness, self-esteem, and life satisfaction measures of mental health and wellbeing? Table 1 details the outcomes reported by reviews for interventions. The most frequently measured outcomes across intervention studies were changes in the level of depression or depressive symptoms, followed by changes in anxiety and mood or affect. Table 2 shows the factors of interest within included studies of association.

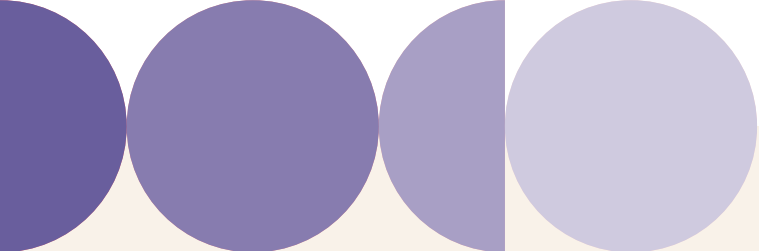


Table 1. Outcomes reported in included intervention studies

Outcome	Number of reviews
Change in depression level/symptoms	68
Change in anxiety level/symptoms	22
Affect and mood	22
Psychosocial wellbeing	7
Performance/properties of screening tools for depression/anxiety	5
General mental health/wellbeing	5
Medication use (i.e., psychotropics, SSRIs)	4
Psychological wellbeing	4
Emotional wellbeing	4
Responses to suicide ideation or suicidal behaviour	4
Adverse effects of medications for depression	2
Acceptance of and satisfaction with telehealth delivery of service	1
Reduced use of health care	1
Interventions designed to change the prescribing behaviour of clinicians or to prompt a review of current medications	5
Clinician-based care interventions aimed to increase or maintain function and provide support for activities of daily living (AoDL)	5
Includes strategies to increase goals of care and advance care planning uptake in aged care settings	5

Table 2. Factors of interest in studies of association (i.e., cross-sectional)

Factor 1	Factor 2	Number of reviews
<b>Medication use</b>		
Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors	Falls in older adults	1
Antipsychotic use	Nursing home characteristics	1
Antidepressant use	Low BMI	1
Potentially inappropriate medication use (includes antidepressants/antipsychotics)	Patient, clinician, system/environmental factors	1
Prescribing of antipsychotics for people with dementia	Correlates	1
<b>Mental health conditions</b>		
Anxiety	Correlates and predictors	1
Depression	Correlates and risk factors	4
Depression	Driving cessation	2
Depression	Falls	1
Depression	Hearing loss/sensory impairments	2
Depression	Informal caregiver distress	1
Depression and anxiety	COVID-19	1
Depression and anxiety	Transitions to long-term care	1
Depression risk	Dietary patterns	1

Factor 1	Factor 2	Number of reviews
Major depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia in people without dementia	Correlates and predictors	1
Depression/OCD/ Psychiatric/mood diagnoses	Weight loss, Low BMI, Malnutrition	1
Mental-physical multimorbidity	Individual factors	1
Chronic mental disorders (RAC)	Wellbeing	1
Chronic mental disorder (home care)	Correlates	<u>1</u>
<b><u>Positive mental health</u></b>		
Mental health	Social support	1
Psychological adjustment to residential aged care	Correlates	2
Thriving	Correlates and predictors	1
Psychological wellbeing	Social connections/networks	1
Successful mental health interventions	Correlates	1
<b><u>Service use</u></b>		
Access to mental health services	Correlates	2
Access to mental health services (rural vs urban)	Correlates	1
<b><u>Diverse populations</u></b>		
Access to mental health services	Black and minority populations (US)	1
Depression	Correlates in South Asian populations	1
Mental illness in LGBTQI+ older populations	Psychosocial experiences of ageing	1
Wellbeing	Indigenous Peoples (international)	1

## First review update

In May 2023, we identified a total of 31 systematic reviews on this topic published since the original scoping review (July 2022). Of these, six had relevance to the existing evidence themes on mental health and wellbeing in aged care and were incorporated into theme findings. Table 3 shows how these newer reviews contributed to the original theme content. As part of this process, no additional themes were created.

Table 3. Review update outcomes

Theme	Number of included reviews from original 2022 scoping review	Number of included reviews from 2023 review update	Contribution to existing content
Anxiety	6	1	Strengthened existing findings and contributed additional findings
Dementia and mental health	18	1	Additional findings
Physical activity	11	2	Strengthened existing findings and contributed additional findings
Screening tools	6	1	Strengthened existing findings and contributed additional findings
Suicidal thoughts and self-harm	3	1	Additional findings

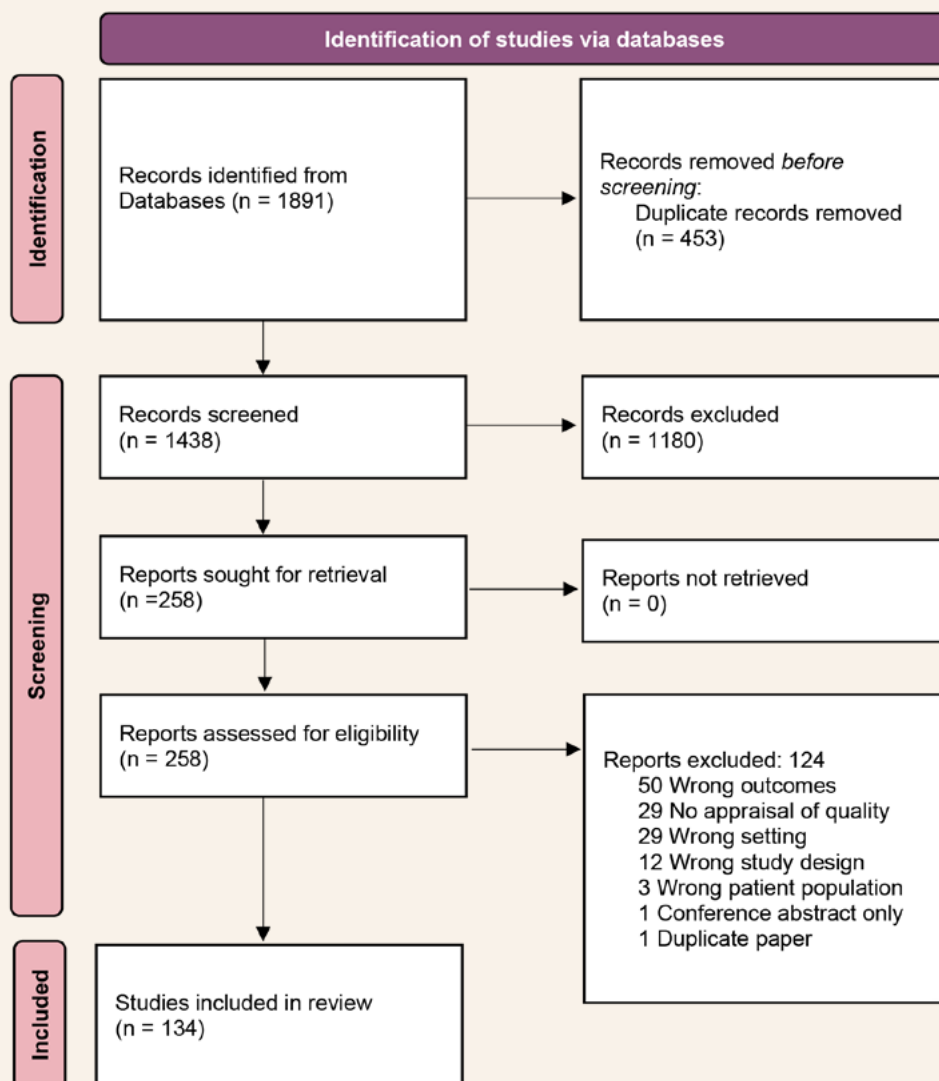


Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart of study selection

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## References

1. Beyond Blue. Older people [Internet]. N.D. [cited 2023 Aug 05]. Available from: [www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/about-our-work/older-adults-program](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/about-our-work/older-adults-program)
2. Bhar S. Reducing depression in nursing homes requires more than just antidepressants [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2023 Aug 5]. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/reducing-depression-in-nursing-homes-requires-more-than-just-antidepressants-38970>

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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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