

## Reports from the colleges

# Mental health education resources for Australia's general practitioners

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General Practitioners (GPs) are critical contributors towards mental health care in Australia. Each year Australia's GPs provide over 11 million consultations to people presenting with a mental health problem.<sup>1</sup> GPs are the preferred first source of professional assistance for people with depression in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is a national membership-based organisation which sets and maintains standards for high-quality general practice, leads the education, training and assessment processes for GPs, advocates on behalf of the profession and supports Australia's GPs in meeting the healthcare needs of the Australian population. The RACGP is Australia's largest medical college and the largest GP organisation in Australia with a membership of over 18000, including more than 5500 members of the RACGP National Rural Faculty.

The RACGP is involved in many activities aiming to support the provision of quality mental health care in general practice. Some of the projects at the RACGP are listed below.

## The RACGP curriculum for Australian general practice

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This integrated curriculum is designed to provide guidance to doctors across their professional lives encompassing medical student, pre-vocational training, vocational training and into continuing professional development. Specifically in this document is a statement of requirements for the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by our discipline in dealing with the mental health needs of our patients.

The document is available at [www.racgp.org.au/curriculum](http://www.racgp.org.au/curriculum)

## Mental health guidelines

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The RACGP produces many guidelines to support GPs to deliver high-quality care. The RACGP Guidelines for preventive activities in general practice<sup>3</sup> provide evidence-based guidelines on preventive care, including advice on screening for depression. The companion guideline, *Putting Prevention into Practice*,<sup>4</sup> provides strategies for implementing preventive activities in the general practice setting. The National guide to a preventive health assessment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>5</sup> provides screening recommendations for mental health and suicide prevention in Australia's indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A number of other guidelines relevant to mental health are published on the RACGP website and are available free of charge at [www.racgp.org.au/mentalhealth](http://www.racgp.org.au/mentalhealth)

## Online education for general practitioners

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gpLearning is the RACGP online education and training program for its members.<sup>6</sup> It contains many hundreds of hours of high-quality professional development activities including a focus on mental health topics, such as the diagnosis and management of depression, psychosis, bipolar disorder and substance use. Access to gpLearning is available free of charge to RACGP members and by subscription to other medical practitioners.

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## Resources and publications

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The RACGP produces a range of regular publications which frequently include clinical updates and other relevant information for GPs on the diagnosis and management of mental health problems:

*Australian Family Physician* is the RACGP's official monthly journal. It features articles relevant to mental health. Articles are freely accessible through PubMed and the RACGP website.<sup>7</sup>

The *Check Program* is a monthly paper-based continuing education resource which has been produced by the RACGP for over 30 years. Each month covers a different clinical issue and education is provided through case reports and short answer and multiple choice questions. Mental health is a frequent element of these programs and regular editions are specifically about mental health issues. The *Check Program* is available free of charge to RACGP members or by subscription to other medical practitioners.

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## GP psychiatry telephone support service

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This service provides Australia's GPs with free advice on patient management from a psychiatrist. The service can be accessed by telephone, fax or via the internet 24 hours a day and a psychiatrist provides the GP with a response within 24 hours. It includes support by psychiatrists with specialised interests in child and adolescent mental health, drug and alcohol issues, and the management of people with more than one mental health concern. The service is funded by the Australian Government and hosted by the RACGP.

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## Professional peer support

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Doctors may do well at managing the health care for their patients, but we are not always particularly good at looking after our own needs, including our mental health and wellbeing. The RACGP leads a number of programs that aim to support improved mental health of medical practitioners, including a formal peer support program which is open to all doctors in Australia.

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## General practice mental health standards collaboration

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The RACGP chairs and hosts the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaboration (GPMHSC). The GPMHSC aims to promote the development and uptake of quality education and training in mental health for general practitioners and general practice teams. The collaboration is funded by the Australian Government and includes representatives of the RACGP, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Australian Psychological Society and also includes a consumer and a carer nominated by the Mental Health Council of Australia.

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## Mental health professionals' associations

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The Mental Health Professionals Association (MHPA) is a joint initiative of the RACGP, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses. The MHPA aims to foster initiatives and advocacy around mental health care at a national level than aim to improve mental health and wellbeing in the community. These professional collaborations are important in both the provision of multidisciplinary professional education and advocacy to government about mental health. This group has recently trialled an interdisciplinary education workshop to encourage joint learning. Such collaborations assist the key mental health professional groups in the country to work better together to provide better services to the people of our nation.

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Further details of resources in mental health available through the RACGP can be found at: [www.racgp.org.au/mentalhealth](http://www.racgp.org.au/mentalhealth)

#### REFERENCES

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- 2 Highet NJ, Hickie IB and Davenport TA. Monitoring awareness of and attitudes to depression in Australia. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2002;20:176 (Suppl): S63–8.
- 3 [www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/redbook](http://www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/redbook)
- 4 [www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/greenbook](http://www.racgp.org.au/guidelines/greenbook)
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