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# Evaluation of a Wellbeing Skills Group Program for Older Adults: The Healthy Ageing Service Wellbeing Skills Group

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## Rationale

As Australia's population ages, providing appropriate and effective mental health and wellbeing support to older adults is an important social issue<sup>1</sup>.

Ageing is closely linked to numerous physical and psychosocial stressors, including loss of independence, functional decline, loneliness, and social isolation<sup>2</sup>.

Increasing service demands mean that engaging older adults in evidence-based, short-term group interventions is time and cost effective<sup>3</sup>.

There is clear evidence supporting the effectiveness of group program care for adults experiencing mental health concerns<sup>4</sup>, however, the evidence base in older adults is less developed.

## Introduction

The Healthy Ageing Service (HAS) is a multidisciplinary mental health service funded by the Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network.

HAS was developed to support the mental health needs of people over 65 years who need more than primary care but do not meet referral criteria to access tertiary psychiatric services.

Clinicians from the HAS team collaboratively developed a Wellbeing Skills Group Program (WSGP) for older adults.

The WSGP focused on equipping older adult mental health consumers with a range of evidence-based psychosocial skills to promote and maintain mental health and wellbeing, such as mindfulness and self-compassion.

## References

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## Aim

A quality assurance study was conducted to review the implementation of the Healthy Ageing Service Wellbeing Skills Group Program.

## Methods

Consumers aged 65 years or older, presenting with mild-moderate mental health symptoms (e.g., depression, loneliness, adjustment difficulties, anxiety), or who were interested in learning skills to enhance their mental health and wellbeing, were eligible for the WSGP.

Data collection involved a combination of demographic variables, psychological outcome measures, and a pre and post group feedback survey.

## Results

A total of 40 consumers participated in the WSGP between June 2022 and October 2023. The average age of consumers was 77 years (SD=7.2), and majority were female (82.5%).

On discharge, consumers showed statistically significant improvement on functioning and psychiatric symptoms as rated by clinicians. However no significant changes observed for psychological distress, as measured using the Kessler 10 (K10).

Survey feedback from consumers was overwhelmingly positive (see figure below).

## FIGURE 1.

### Feedback Survey

- 37 pre-group surveys completed
- 21 post-group surveys completed

Improvements in self-reported knowledge for all topics



Sessions were relevant and met expectations (76.2%)



Enjoyed the program and found facilitation helpful (>90%)



“Strongly agree” they can implement learnings into daily life (61.9%)





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## Limitations

The lack of significant change in K10 scores is likely influenced by inconsistent administration and the tendency for older adults to under-report symptoms.

Interpretation of outcomes is limited by the small sample size and reliance on routine clinical data rather than research-specific measures.

Including a cognitive screening tool may help clarify how cognitive functioning affects participants' ability to benefit from the wellbeing skills group.

## Conclusion

Running a group program focused on psychological skills for emotional wellbeing is both feasible and acceptable for older adult mental health consumers.

Group programs may be an efficient and scalable way of increasing a service's capacity to provide mental health services to a vulnerable population with poor access to mental health support.

However, before more group programs are implemented, additional research is needed to evaluate efficacy of these programs.



### **Healthy Ageing Service Wellbeing Skills Group Program Team (L-R):**

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