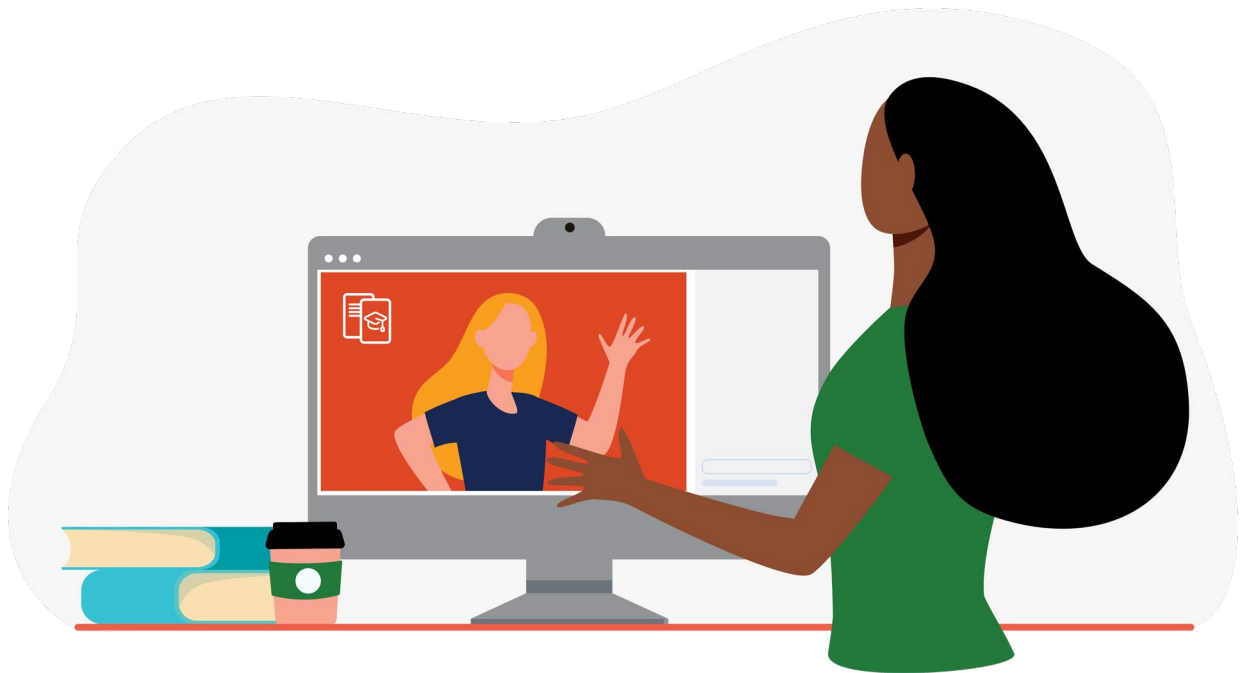


August 2023

Building Educators' skills in Adolescent Mental Health (BEAM)

Funder: The Balnaves Foundation, Allens Linklaters, CommBank, Black Dog Institute Kickstarter
CRESP stream: Schools



Research aims

BEAM is a blended training program designed to increase secondary school teachers' confidence in supporting students' mental health, including students experiencing self-harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. This study sought to measure the impact of BEAM on educators' confidence, knowledge and awareness in managing students' mental health in the school setting.

Overview

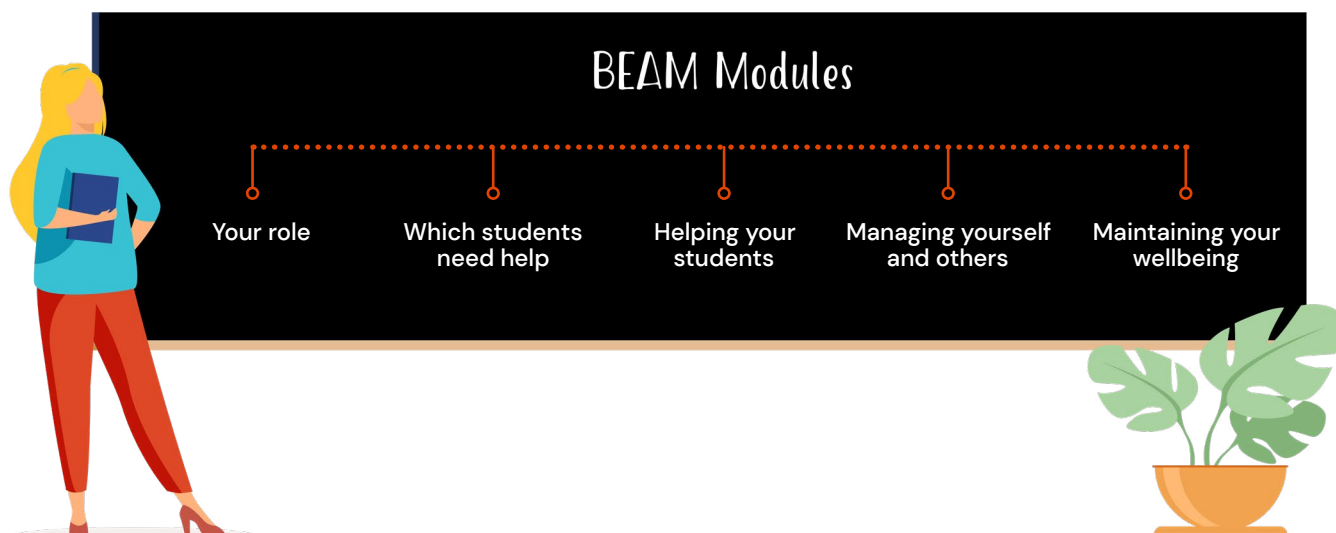
The teen years are a high-risk period for mental health challenges, with up to 50 per cent of mental illnesses emerging during high school¹. Trusted adults play an important role in supporting young people through this challenging period; for many young people, teachers are an

important resource and can help them identify the signs of mental ill health and connect them with relevant help. Equipping teachers with the skills, knowledge and confidence to support the students in their care is an important step in reducing self-harm and suicide risk among young people.

About BEAM

BEAM is comprised of five online modules that are combined with in-person skills development and peer coaching. Program content emphasises identifying students in need, asking students about self-harm and suicide, connecting students to appropriate help, managing students who have returned to school after a mental health-related absence, and supporting teachers to maintain their own emotional wellbeing.

¹ Kessler et al, 2005.



Lived experience input

An advisory group comprised of 12 year advisors from NSW secondary schools (both government and independent) was convened to provide real-world insights into the skills and knowledge teachers would require to better support students' mental health. All participants had lived experience of caring for adolescents facing mental health challenges and came from a range of geographic locations. Their insights helped shape the BEAM program content and structure, as well as its delivery format.

Program timeline

- 1 Systematic review (2018)
- 2 Pilot study (2019)
- 3 Randomised controlled trial (2020)

Research activities

Phase 1: Systematic review (2018)

A systematic review of the effectiveness of mental health training programs revealed a lack of evidence-based training programs designed to improve the knowledge, attitudes and helping behaviours of secondary school teachers.

The review identified a clear gap in teacher training and the need for more rigorous research to support the development of effective training programs that can help teachers to better support student mental health.

Phase 2: Pilot study (2019)

Seventy year advisors from 28 NSW schools took part in a pilot study to study BEAM's effectiveness and acceptability in improving teachers' mental health knowledge, attitudes, confidence and helping behaviours. Participants reported significant improvements in confidence and helping behaviours, which were sustained at three-month follow up.

They also identified time paucity, competing priorities and forgetfulness as barriers to program completion. This led to a series of modifications to the BEAM program to increase the likelihood of participant completions.

These included:


- topic recommendations to help tailor content to users' individual needs
- making all program content available to participants at once, rather than in stages
- the introduction of additional SMS reminders
- optimising the program for use on mobiles and tablets.


Phase 3: Randomised controlled trial (2020)

Once the modifications had been made to the BEAM program, 295 educators from 73 Australian secondary schools took part in a randomised controlled trial to assess the updated program’s impact on teachers’ confidence, mental health knowledge, attitudes, psychological distress and helping behaviour towards students.


Participants were split into an intervention group (who received BEAM for a 10-week period) and a waitlist control group. After completing the program, the intervention group reported significantly greater confidence and perceived mental health knowledge, awareness and literacy; these impacts were still present three months after the trial had been completed.





295
 participants



73
 secondary schools


.....
 22 in regional/rural locations



2
 trial arms

After completing BEAM, teachers reported:


 significant increases in their overall levels of confidence in supporting students’ mental health


 greater knowledge and awareness of mental health issues affecting adolescents


20%
 increase in confidence around talking to students about self-harm and suicide


20%
 increase in confidence around preparing return-to-school plans for students who were absent due to mental health crises

.....
 asking students about self-harm and suicide-related thoughts and behaviours more frequently

Phase 4: Professional accreditation and public release (2023)

In May 2023, BEAM was professionally accredited by the NSW Education Standards Authority, paving the way for its widespread rollout in NSW schools. A public launch is now planned for mid-to-late 2023.

Impact

The research findings suggest that BEAM improves important training outcomes for educators who are in a prime position to support students’ mental health. Increasing teachers’ confidence in their abilities to identify students in distress and to intervene and connect them to timely and appropriate support has the power to create safer and mentally healthier schools in which young people can thrive.

Research team

Research team



Associate Professor Bridianne O'Dea
(project lead)



Professor Philip Batterham



Dr Belinda Parker



Dr Mirjana Subotic-Kerry



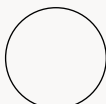
Dr Alexis Whitton



Dr Aimee Gayed



Professor Sam Harvey



Professor Andrew MacKinnon



Professor Jill Newby

Publications

Anderson, M., et al. (2019). Mental Health Training Programs for Secondary School Teachers: A Systematic Review. *School Mental Health* 11, 489–508. doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-9291-2

O'Dea, B., et al. (2021). Secondary school Year Advisors' perspectives on their role, responsibilities and training needs for student mental health: Insights from a co-design workshop. *Research Square*. doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-294624/v1

Parker, B.L., et al. (2021), Examining the Preliminary Effectiveness and Acceptability of a Web-Based Training Program for Australian Secondary School Teachers: Pilot Study of the BEAM (Building Educators' Skills in Adolescent Mental Health) Program. *JMIR Mental Health*, 8(10):e29989. doi.org/10.2196/29989

O'Dea, B., et al. (2021). Building Educators' Skills in Adolescent Mental Health: A cluster randomized controlled trial of a student mental health training program for secondary school educators. *JMIR Res Protoc*, 24;10(2):e25870. doi.org/10.2196/25870.

crisp@blackdog.org.au

The Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention (CRESP) is a collaborative program led by Black Dog Institute that aims to reduce the suicide rate in Australia.

August 2023