mental health framework
Framework statement

The AFL Mental Health Framework exists to contribute to the Industry through the achievement of objectives outlined in section three of this document.

The AFL Mental Health Framework ensures the AFL industry establishes a shared understanding of the importance of primary prevention for mental health, alongside highlighting its prevalence, its impact and the support mechanisms available to members of the AFL industry.

This Framework is intended to educate, support and empower people across the industry to recognise the issue, and to emphasise the importance of early identification and intervention for those who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing a mental health issue. It is intended that through education and awareness raising activities, targeted research and building the internal capacity of our industry we can ensure that Australian Football is well positioned to de-stigmatise the issue of mental health. Through this established internal capacity, a positive and supportive mental health environment will be created for all those associated with our game.
Background

The broader context of the AFL Mental Health Framework is informed by ABS statistics which indicate that 26% of young Australians suffer from anxiety, affective or substance use disorders or other mental illness, whilst 45% of Australian adults will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives*. These statistics demonstrate that mental health is a significant issue facing our community, and consequently the AFL industry.

Research also indicates that issues of mental health are more likely to develop between the ages of 12 and 26 than at any other stage of life. Less than 25% of young people suffering from a mental illness currently seek and receive treatment. In 2015 approximately 405 young people completed intentional self-harm resulting in suicide, which accounted for one-third of deaths among people 15-24 years of age**.

The average age of an AFL playing group is 23.7 years. Whilst AFL coaches, umpires, key support staff and administrators are by majority older than the 12 to 26 year old age group, the AFL industry represents a unique environment that often demands significant working hours with varying degrees of job security.

These factors when considered against the above research provide a rationale for coaches, umpires and administrators to be considered an important stakeholder of this framework.

*Source: ABS SMHWB 2007
**Source: ABS cause of death data 2015
Objectives

The aim of the AFL Mental Health Framework is to:

- Promote the importance of the mental health and wellbeing of those within the AFL industry;
- Educate and raise awareness of the AFL industry of the prevalence and impact, causal factors and categories of mental illness that exist across the community;
- To build the capacity of the AFL industry to recognise the signs, activate early intervention and support those that may be experiencing a mental illness.

The framework objectives will be achieved through the six key areas outlined in diagram 1.

Diagram 1
The framework is designed to support the development and implementation of initiatives that inform or address the issue of mental health within Australian Football, at the national, state league or community level.

The scope of the AFL’s Mental Health Framework extends to all persons whether working in a paid or voluntary capacity, within the AFL industry.

In considering the scope of this framework the AFL industry recognises the need for collaboration across a range of organisations, including the:

- AFL
- AFL Clubs
- State Body affiliates
- AFL Players Association
- AFL Coaches’ Association
- AFL Umpires Association
- Industry Player Development Governance Committee
- Health industry experts
The World Health Organisation states that the term ‘mental disorder’ broadly covers a wide range of conditions that affect mood, thinking and behaviour:

- Mental illness,
- Mental retardation,
- Personality disorders, and
- Substance dependence

For the purposes of this policy the following are defined as:

**AFL** – the body responsible for the game of Australian football, including codes, rules and policies that support the game

**AFL Clubs** – the 18 organisations that form part of the AFL competition

**State Body affiliates** – the group of organisations’ responsible for the delivery of respective State League competitions and programs

**AFL Players Association** – the representative body for AFL Players

**AFL Coaches Association** – the representative body for AFL Coaches

**AFL Umpires Association** – the representative body for AFL Umpires

**Industry Player Development Governance Committee** – shared governance model which ensures a consistent approach to industry player development throughout the player lifecycle, assuming responsibility for the evolution, delivery and ultimate accountability for player development across Clubs and the AFL industry.

**Mental Health** – a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO, 2014).

**Industry experts and peak bodies** – relevant professionals and bodies that have expertise in mental health and wellbeing.
Roles & responsibilities

As part of the AFL Mental Health Framework the following stakeholders have key roles and responsibilities:

**AFL Education** – Oversight of the AFL’s Education, Wellbeing and Leadership Strategy including participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, education and awareness raising activities across the AFL industry

**AFL Player’s Association** – Collaborate as part of the Industry Governance Committee’s approach to player development and nominated working groups including the Mental Health Industry Review.

**AFL Clubs** – Observe all facets of the AFL’s Mental Health Framework including establishing and promoting connections with support services and developing social responsibility components of the framework

**Industry Governance Committee** – Determine the overall industry position, key performance indicators and strategy for player development (including mental health)

**Industry experts** – Provide advice and support where required to AFL Education and the AFLPA
Awareness-raising activities

Through the AFL Mental Health Framework the AFL and key stakeholders within the AFL industry aim to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of the mental health and wellbeing for those within the AFL industry
- Raise awareness of the AFL industry of the prevalence and impact, causal factors and categories of mental illness that exist across the community
- De-stigmatise the prevalence of mental health issues within the football community

Industry and community awareness-raising will be supported through:

- Media engagement
- Incorporation of key messaging with AFL campaigns
- Development of information resources

The following mediums will be used to communicate messages to the AFL industry:

- Online campaigns
- Social media
- Print and hardcopy
- TVC campaigns
- Other mediums as identified.
Education programs

Through the AFL Mental Health Framework the AFL and key stakeholders within the AFL industry aim to:

- Build educational capacity to ensure the AFL industry establishes a shared understanding of the importance of primary prevention for mental health.
- Highlight the prevalence and impact of mental health in the community and the support mechanisms available to members of the AFL industry.

Education programs will be developed and delivered across the industry by the following stakeholders in line with their roles and responsibilities:

- AFL Education
- AFL Player’s Association
- AFL Clubs
- Industry experts

The following mediums will be used to educate to the AFL industry:

- Digital education
- Face to face programs
- Peer to peer support programs

Importantly all education programs delivered through the Mental Health Framework will:

- Adhere to adult learning principles
- Be underpinned by a primary prevention approach
- Be developed and delivered by suitably qualified people
Support services

Through the AFL Mental Health Framework the AFL and key stakeholders within the AFL industry aim to:

- Work closely with the AFLPA, the AFLCA, the AFLUA and individuals representing clubs at the national, state league and community levels to establish appropriate support networks;
- Draw upon new and established partnerships with expert mental health organisations to support the ongoing development and refinement of the AFL’s Mental Health Framework, including education programs and resources;
- Only engage with mental health and well being services who are suitably accredited.
Social response

The AFL has relationships with several industry experts and peak bodies. All partners that work with the AFL will be considered part of a social response to the issue of mental health.

Support services will be the key network through which those in the AFL industry can seek support. The social response component of this framework refers to the broader contribution that the AFL industry can make to the issue of mental health across the community.

Partnerships with suitably qualified organisations will allow the AFL industry to:

- Promote initiatives that contribute to improving mental health outcomes across the broader community
- Identify opportunities to promote fundraising and ongoing support for organisations that contribute to improving mental health outcomes for individuals and the community
- Provide opportunities to engage other associated key partners of the AFL industry, with organisations that contribute to improving mental health outcomes for individuals and the community
There are however areas that require a more concentrated research and evaluation focus, one of which is mental health. The AFL’s commitment to evidence based evaluation and research practices will contribute to achieving greater mental health and wellbeing outcomes for those involved in the AFL industry.

The research and evaluation principles that apply to the AFL Mental Health Framework include:

- Research and evaluation undertaken will be completed by suitably accredited person(s);
- Research and evaluation outcomes will be shared with relevant key stakeholders;
- Research and evaluation outcomes will be evidence based and adhere to the AFL Research Board Guidelines.
Compliance & accountabilities

The compliance and accountabilities of stakeholders to the AFL Mental Health Framework occurs through the following mechanisms:

**AFL Player Rules**

*Rule 35 – Discrimination and Racial and Religious Vilification*

No person subject to these rules shall act towards or speak to any other person in a manner, or engage in any other conduct which threatens, disparages, vilifies or insults another person (the person vilified) on any basis, including but not limited to, a person’s race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, special ability/disability or sexual orientation, preference or identity.

The scope of the AFL Player Rules extends only to those involved in Australian football at the AFL competition level.

The AFL, on behalf of its AFL State and Territory affiliates, has developed a Vilification Rule which can be adapted to State League and community football environments.

**AFL member protection policy**

The Member Protection Policy applies:

- To the AFL, the people within the purview of the AFL Players Rules and AFL Regulations, whether they are in a paid or unpaid/voluntary capacity; and
- To each Affiliated State Body, all people under the purview of that Affiliated State Body, whether they are in a paid or unpaid/voluntary capacity.
Clause 4.1 of the Vilification & Discrimination Section of the Member Protection Policy states:

No league participant or Club Official shall engage in conduct which may reasonably be considered to incite hatred towards, contempt for, ridicule of or discrimination against a person or group of persons on the ground of their race, religion, gender, colour, sexual preference, orientation or identity, or special ability/disability.

Under the relevant legislation across Australia, unless a specific exclusion applies, it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on a variety of grounds including, but not limited to the following:

- Age;
- Irrelevant criminal record;
- Disability;
- Political belief/activity;
- Marital status;
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding;
- Parental/carer status;
- Race;
- Religious belief/activity;
- Family/carer responsibilities;
- Gender identity/transgender status;
- Lawful sexual activity/sexual orientation;
- Irrelevant medical record;
- Sex/gender;
- Social origin;
- Trade union membership/activity;
- Physical features;
- Association with a person with one or more of the characteristics listed above.

Relevant federal & state legislation

The AFL recognises its legislative duty of care under the relevant Federal and State Anti-Discrimination Laws (i.e. Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), State Anti-Discrimination/Equal Opportunity Acts, etc.)