

Education sector less prepared for critical incidents despite gains in mental health capability, national report finds

New data from Be You, Beyond Blue's mental health in education initiative, reveals that educators are becoming more confident in supporting everyday mental health concerns, but less confident their schools and early learning services are prepared to respond to critical incidents.

The *State of Mental Health in Education 2026 Report*, shows that educators' confidence that their early learning service or school is adequately prepared to support children and young people following a critical incident has fallen from 71 per cent in 2024 to 63 per cent in 2026.

The findings are drawn from Be You's National Mental Health in Education Survey, a nationally representative survey of more than 2,000 educators across Australia that has been conducted since 2018 as part of Beyond Blue's mental health in education initiative, Be You.

The results come as early learning services and schools are increasingly responding to complex and traumatic events, including natural disasters, deaths within the community and other incidents that can profoundly affect children, young people, educators and families.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman AO said the findings highlight not only the importance of Be You being there with specialised support and guidance for educators through their most challenging days, but also helping education settings prepare before a crisis occurs.

"When a critical incident affects an early learning service or school, educators are often supporting children and young people through grief, uncertainty and distress while also carrying the impact of the event themselves.

"These findings are a reminder that improving preparedness isn't just about supporting children and young people when a crisis occurs. It's also about recognising the demands these events place on educators and ensuring they're supported in the important role they play in help their communities recover, Ms Harman said.

Be You provides Australia's only dedicated national postvention and critical incident support service designed specifically for education settings, offering expert guidance and practical support to early learning services and schools to prepare for and respond to traumatic events.

The report shows the value of this support in building preparedness. Educators in settings where Be You is embedded, or where targeted postvention support has been provided, were more likely to feel confident that their service or school was adequately prepared to support children and young people following a critical incident.

Head of Be You, Beyond Blue, Kate Memish, said the strongest responses to critical incidents begin long before a crisis occurs.

"Recovery from a critical incident is stronger when early learning services and schools already have plans, processes and support systems in place before an incident occurs."

“Being prepared helps educators respond with greater confidence, coordinate support more effectively and create the conditions for children, young people and communities to recover well,” Ms Memish said.

While confidence in preparedness for critical incidents has declined, the report found encouraging progress across other areas of mental health support.

Confidence in recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health concerns increased from 66 per cent in 2023 to 76 per cent in 2026, while confidence in responding appropriately to support children and young people experiencing mental health challenges increased from 72 per cent to 80 per cent over the same period.

The findings reflect the growing role educators play in supporting mental health and wellbeing, with 89 per cent agreeing it is part of their job.

As educators take on an increasingly important role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, it is also important to recognise the impact this responsibility can have on their own wellbeing and ensure the appropriate supports are in place.

This responsibility comes as educators continue to identify mental health concerns, including depression and anxiety, as the leading health challenge facing children and young people (63 per cent). Reflecting the scale of the issue, more than half of educators (53 per cent) do not agree that children and young people in their learning community are mentally healthy.

As the complexity of challenges facing children and young people continues to grow, maintaining a strong national approach to mental health and wellbeing in education, from promotion of wellbeing to specialist support that helps education settings prepare for and recover from critical incidents is essential.

“Be You’s reach now extends to 74% of schools and 37% of early learning services, supporting more than 14,000 education settings nationwide with evidence-based mental health and postvention support. As the current funding period for the initiative approaches its conclusion in 2027, we look forward to continuing positive discussions with the Commonwealth Government about how Beyond Blue, headspace and Early Childhood Australia can continue supporting educators into the future,” Ms Harman said.

The State of Mental Health in Education 2026 can be found at: beyou.edu.au

-Ends-



Media Release

About Be You

Be You is Australia's national mental health and wellbeing initiative for education, delivered by Beyond Blue in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Free to all early learning services and schools in Australia, Be You provides access to evidence-based tools, professional learning and expert guidance to help embed mental health and wellbeing into everyday practice, leadership and culture.

About Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue provides mental health information, support and advice to help everyone feel better earlier and stay well. Last year more than 300,000 people contacted Beyond Blue's free, confidential, 24/7 Support Service. Call 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support.

For more information about the National Mental Health in Education Survey go to: beyou.edu.au

For interviews contact: media@beyondblue.org.au