The Melbourne Charter asserts that mental health and wellbeing are:

- an indivisible part of general health;
- essential for the wellbeing and optimal functioning of individuals, families, communities and societies; and
- a fundamental right of every human being, without discrimination.

The Melbourne Charter affirms that mental health and wellbeing is:

- of universal relevance;
- most threatened by poor and unequal living conditions, conflict and violence; and
- a key indicator of a nation's social and economic development.

The Melbourne Charter believes that mental health and wellbeing is:

- everybody's concern and responsibility;
- best achieved in equitable, just and non-violent societies; and
- advanced through respectful, participatory means where culture and cultural heritage and diversity is acknowledged and valued.

The Melbourne Charter identifies principles and actions that governments, communities, organisations and individuals can take to influence the interconnecting social, economic, cultural, environmental and personal factors that influence mental health and wellbeing.

**Mental health**

Mental health is a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing in which each person is able to realise one's abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and make a unique contribution to one's community.

Mental illnesses such as anxiety disorders, depression and schizophrenia are real and potentially disabling conditions, affecting over 450 million individuals, families and carers worldwide.

Poor mental health, loss of wellbeing, and illness have economic and social consequences for societies, communities, families and individuals. Mental health promotion is a strategic and sustainable approach to eliminating or minimising those factors which give rise to distress and loss of wellbeing and introducing and maximising those which create the circumstances in which all can flourish. It is also important in the process of recovery from illnesses or episodes of illness.

**Principles for promoting mental health and preventing mental illness**

Mental health and wellbeing are determined by multiple and interacting social, environmental, psychological and biological factors, just as health and illness in general are determined.

The critical social, environmental and economic determinants of mental wellbeing and of mental illness are common across nations. Individual, family-related and community protective factors and risk factors can be biological, emotional, cognitive, cultural, behavioural, interpersonal and environmental. The presence of multiple risk factors, the lack of protective factors and the interplay of these culminate in greater likelihood of poor mental health and wellbeing and the development of mental illness (see boxes below).

Mental health promotion aims to improve social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing by creating supportive living conditions and environments that foster connectedness between people, strength in recovery from illness; and competence and resilience in individuals and communities. Prevention strategies are a core component of mental health promotion.

**Population-based approaches for promoting mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental illness work by:**

- utilising principles of public participation, engagement and empowerment;
- redressing inequities and discriminatory practices that exclude the most socially disadvantaged or at risk such as indigenous people; people with mental illness; children and young people, people with disabilities, elderly people and those in prison; action in everyday contexts such as in schools, workplaces, sports clubs, community-based activities, government services and the natural environment;
- providing access to quality care and recovery-focused services for those who are experiencing poor mental health or mental illness;
- combining advocacy, communication, policy and legislation, together with community participation and evidence-building strategies;
- joining up policies and practices across sectors, including education, housing, mental health services, employment and industry, transport, arts, sports, urban planning and justice; and are accompanied by person-centered responses to mental distress and loss of wellbeing that foster hope, offer choices, support people to lead their own recoveries and ensure a quick return to active citizenship.

**Protective factors and risk factors for mental health and wellbeing**

**Protective factors**

Arts and cultural engagement
Childhood: positive early childhood experiences, material access
Cultural identity
Diversity: accentuated, shared, valued
Education: accessible
Environments: safe
Empathy
Empowerment and self-determination
Family: resilience, parenting, companionship, positive relationship with parents and other family members
Food: accessible, quality
Housing: affordable, accessible
Income: secure, accessible employment and work conditions
Personal resilience and social skills
Physical health
Respect
Social participation: supportive relationships, involvement in group and community activity and networks
Sport and recreation: participation and access
Transport: accessible and affordable
Services: accessible quality health and social services
Spirituality

**Risk factors**

Alcohol and drugs: access and abuse
Disability: social and economic
Displacement: refugee and asylum seeker status
Discrimination and stigma
Education: lack of access
Environment: unsafe, overcrowded, poor resourced
Family: fragmentation, dysfunction and child neglect, post-maternal depression
Food: inadequate and inaccessible
Genetics
Harmful relationships

The Melbourne Charter was developed at From Margins to Mainstream: 5th World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and the Prevention of Mental and Behavioural Disorders. It reflects input from conference participants and the conference partners group.