# Teacher Experience Evidence Summary

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**Purpose:** This document translates the literature evidence synthesis on teacher experience into a ‘Frequently Asked Question’ aligned with the iyarn matrix model. This FAQ is designed to:

1. Provide a ‘snapshot’ of the research evidence, useful in conversation and materials with stakeholders;
2. Mirror the extended literature review, so the detail is *always* available to those who want it, and you can provide assurance that the claims made are warranted by the evidence;
3. Align with the iyarn matrix model, which shows how the features of the tool target particular outcomes;

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## Topic: How do teachers currently support students’ wellbeing and mental health and what might support this?

### Background assumptions and context

It is important to better understand Australian school teachers’ perspectives and understanding regarding mental health as approximately one in four Australian young people experience mental health issues each year (headspace & Colmar Brunton, 2018).The role of teachers is evolving, and expectations are changing over time in part due to the higher prevalence of mental health concerns amongst students (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015).

Overall research shows that teachers see supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their students as a fundamental part of their role, however there are a range of issues which may impact a teacher’s ability to provide the support required including a lack of training and support, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities and lack of skills and knowledge (survey, Askell-Williams & Cefai, 2014; interview, Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015).

This review of literature and summary focuses primarily on Australian research literature as well informed by relevant research from Canada, UK and USA.

### Key questions:

* What is the evidence around teachers understanding of, and support for, young people’s mental health, and barriers and enables for this support?
* Do teachers’ interventions at an individual and class level help?
* How do teachers conceptualise mental health data? What are the right thresholds for individual/class action? How are teachers able to use check-ins to support their students? Does it help to identify critical moments (both positive and challenging) that support intervening?

### What do teachers currently understand regarding mental health and specific needs?

Teachers have many competing demands, including between attention to academic performance and broader wellbeing, and navigating their own role and expertise in this.

Teachers often feel less equipped to support students than they would like. Despite this, teachers play a key role in support with higher mental health literacy contributing to a supportive environment, and earlier intervention.

Whole school approaches that involve student views, and foster teacher-student relationships can be supportive, with class-based mental health literacy reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking. Teacher wellbeing is also important to fostering this culture.

In adopting approaches, clear systems and responsibilities are important, with external programs needing to require training and be flexible to the particular school context.

### Do teachers’ interventions at an individual and class level help?

Both individual and class-based interventions have been shown to be effective for mental health promotion for students. They may foster shared language, and sense of connectedness. There may be gaps in identifying students ‘at risk’, particularly in areas with less expert support. There are also concerns regarding confidentiality and communication to relevant stakeholders including parents and other professionals.

Whole school approaches can be useful in promoting wellbeing, particularly where there is ongoing training and support for teachers, ideally involving teachers in the design of this support. Programs may be less impactful where such training is not provided or sustained.

### How do teachers think about data for mental health? What are the right thresholds for individual/class action?

There is limited evidence regarding thresholds for individual or class-based action or intervention for mental health, with critical incidents/events often acting as key triggers for interventions in schools. It is not clear how widely used measures for wellbeing factors, such as validated surveys, are in schools. Teachers typically use multiple data sources including knowledge of the student in assessing need. Digital checkins may provide an additional data source for this purpose.