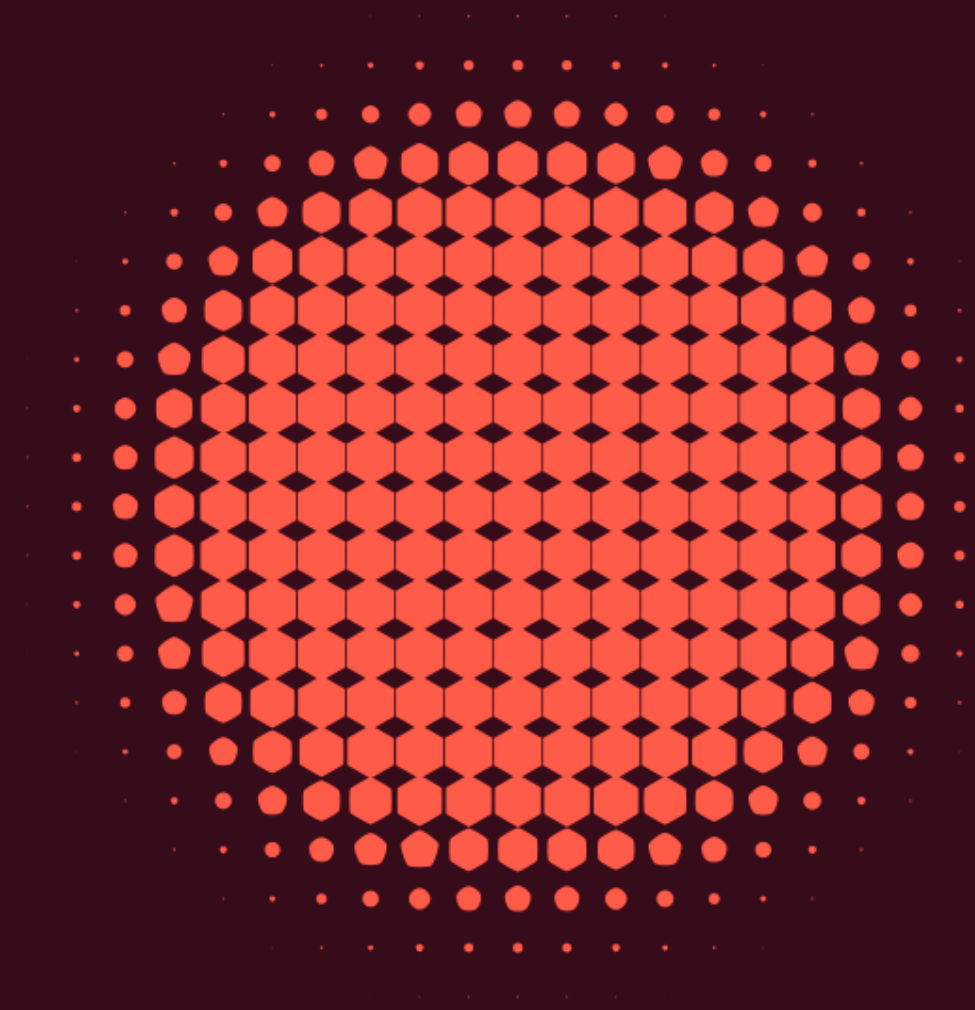


# SUMMARY REPORT

International student journey mapping project



# IMPACT CO.

## Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which our offices stand, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land, its waterways and seas and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

This land always was and always will be the land of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



## Recognition of lived and living experience

We recognise the individual and collective contributions of people with a lived and/or living experience of mental health issues and their families, loved ones and supporters.

We also recognise and acknowledge those with lived and living experience of suicide – whether as someone who has survived a suicide attempt or lives with suicidal thoughts; those who are carers, families and supporters; and those bereaved by suicide.

# CONTENT WARNING

Impact Co. respectfully acknowledges those who have lost their lives or have been affected by suicide or intentional self-harm. We are committed to ensuring our work continues to inform improvements in both community awareness and prevention of suicide and self-harm. This document discusses suicide and presents material that some people may find distressing. If this document raises any issues for you, support services can help.

Crisis support services can be reached 24 hours a day.

- For crisis support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- For support to address distress or thoughts of suicide, call the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467 or visit [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)
- For support, call Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- For support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples call Yarning Safe N Strong on 1800 959 563 or visit [www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong](http://www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safenstrong)
- For support for children and young people, call Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800 or visit [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)
- For support for LGBTIQ+ people, call Rainbow Door on 1800 729 367, text 0480 017 246 or email [support@rainbowdoor.org.au](mailto:support@rainbowdoor.org.au) or visit [www.switchboard.org.au/rainbow-door](http://www.switchboard.org.au/rainbow-door)

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# INTRODUCTION

## Project purpose

The Victorian Department of Health engaged Impact Co. to work with the International Students Wellbeing Taskforce (the taskforce) to develop a series of journey maps to capture the experiences of international students living, working and studying in Victoria, with a specific focus on their mental health, wellbeing and experiences of suicide.

The journey maps are intended to:

- provide a more in-depth understanding of the drivers of the mental health and wellbeing of international students and their interactions with key service systems in Victoria
- identify opportunities for change to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of international students and reduce the risk of suicide.

Impact Co. undertook in-depth interviews and workshops with international students and other stakeholders that work with international students (including the taskforce, Overseas Student Health Cover [OSHC] providers, student associations, education providers, student accommodation providers and representatives from the Department of Health) to develop the journey maps.

### Summary report note

This document provides a summary of findings from consultation as well as the journey maps, and is intended to inform discussion and practical action by relevant stakeholders.

## Project output

The key project milestones and outputs of the international student journey mapping project are outlined below.



**1,950**

international students expressed interest in being involved in interviews.



**20**

international students were interviewed about their experience studying, working and living in Victoria, with 18 interviews conducted in person. The considerations in selecting the international students to interview are outlined on the next page.



**5**

solution design workshops were conducted with the taskforce, international students and other key stakeholders.



**8**

international student persona and journey maps were developed, supported by key insights and opportunities for change.



**10**

organisational focus groups were conducted to hear from people who work with international students.

# CONSULTATION - INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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## Selecting students to participate in interviews

To select the international students that would be interviewed from the list of 1,950 students that expressed interest, we filtered and selected based on key characteristics (e.g. gender, nationality and current level of study) and the intensity of students' experiences with:

- mental health and suicidal distress
- academic stress
- financial stress
- familial pressure
- racism and discrimination
- loneliness and isolation
- poor and unfair working conditions
- settling in Victoria
- stress-related to visa requirements.

## Key characteristics

The 20 international students that were selected to be interviewed had a diverse range of characteristics; some of the key characteristics are outlined below:

- students had a range of mental health and wellbeing experiences (including anxiety, depression, OCD and suicidal thoughts)
- students had varied levels of understanding of the concept of mental health and help-seeking and varied levels of mental health literacy
- students were diverse in their sexualities and included a mix of male and female students
- some students had experienced substance abuse
- students had various current levels of study, including English language schools, TAFE, private colleges and universities (undergraduate and post-graduate studies)
- students were from a range of backgrounds/nationalities, including English, Indian, Russian, Chinese, Malaysian, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Colombian, Cambodian and Vietnamese
- some students had been diagnosed with ADHD or autism spectrum disorder, and some expressed having undiagnosed or untreated ADHD
- a significant number of those interviewed had prior experience of trauma (e.g. family violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse and lived experience of suicidality) before coming to Australia.

# CONSULTATION – SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

## Colleges and institutions

- Cairnmillar Institute
- Melbourne City Institute of Education
- Academia21
- Monash College
- Kangan Institute
- Swinburne College

## Universities

- Deakin University
- Monash University
- La Trobe University
- Torrens University
- University of Melbourne
- RMIT University

## TAFE

- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
- The Gordon Institute of TAFE
- Melbourne Polytechnic

## International student supports

- BUPA
- Private tutor
- NextEd
- Orygen

## The taskforce

- Australian Government Department of Education
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Victorian Department of Education
- Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing
- Victorian Department of Health (Chair)
- Study Melbourne, Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- headspace National
- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
- La Trobe University
- Monash University
- North-Western Melbourne Primary Health Network
- Orygen National
- The Gordon Institute of TAFE
- St Vincent's Hospital
- Universities Australia
- Victorian Transcultural Mental Health, St Vincent's Hospital

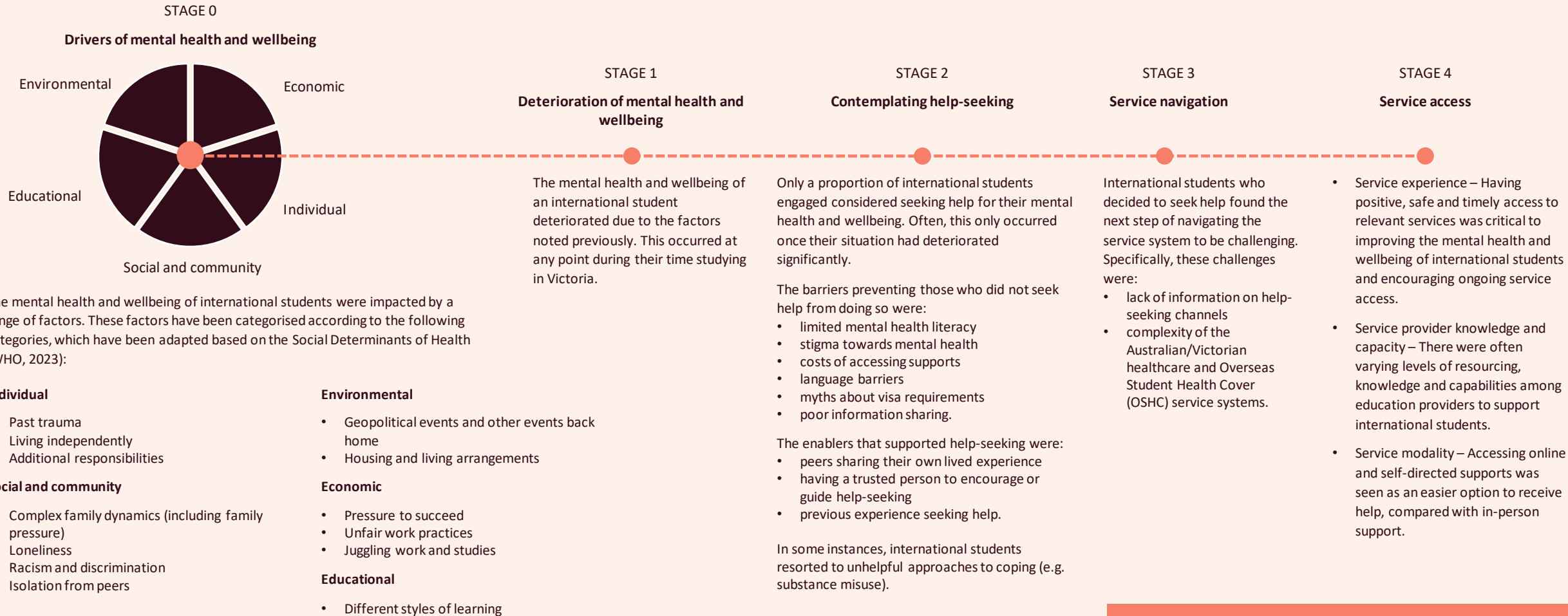
# LIMITATIONS AND CAVEATS

<p><b>Findings based on project consultations</b></p> <p>The findings in this report have been informed by the following project output:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interviews with 20 international students</li> <li>• focus groups and workshops with international students and other key stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>The summary findings and more detailed opportunities for change in the journey maps provide an overview of practical actions to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevent suicide in the international student population, guided by lived and living experience perspectives.</p>	<p><b>Experiences/communities under-represented in this project</b></p> <p>Despite the vast diversity of the cohort of international students who expressed interest in participating in this project, there was no participation from international students who were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trans and gender diverse</li> <li>• had a intersex variation</li> <li>• under 18</li> <li>• from rural and regional areas</li> <li>• people with a physical and sensory-related disability.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Journeys do not represent government policy or guidance</b></p> <p>The journeys are not based on qualitative or quantitative research, and are not a depiction of an actual real-world, single experience.</p> <p>The journeys do not represent government policy or operational guidance.</p>	<p><b>Limited help-seeking and service navigation experience among international students</b></p> <p>58% of the international students who expressed interest in participating in the interview had not sought help for their mental ill-health, highlighting the limited extent of help-seeking among international students. This is reflected in the journey maps developed as part of this project (i.e. not all the journey maps outlined below involve help-seeking).</p> <p>The barriers to help-seeking are explored in the journey maps..</p>	<p><b>Minimising duplication within the 8 journey maps</b></p> <p>To maximise the exploration of themes and insights that were captured across the interviews, the Project Team methodically allocated and distributed insights and recommendations across the 8 journey maps. This was intended to minimise duplication of insights. Therefore, the journey maps do not capture the prevalence or frequency of an insight.</p>
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# SUMMARY FINDINGS – CONSULTATION INSIGHTS

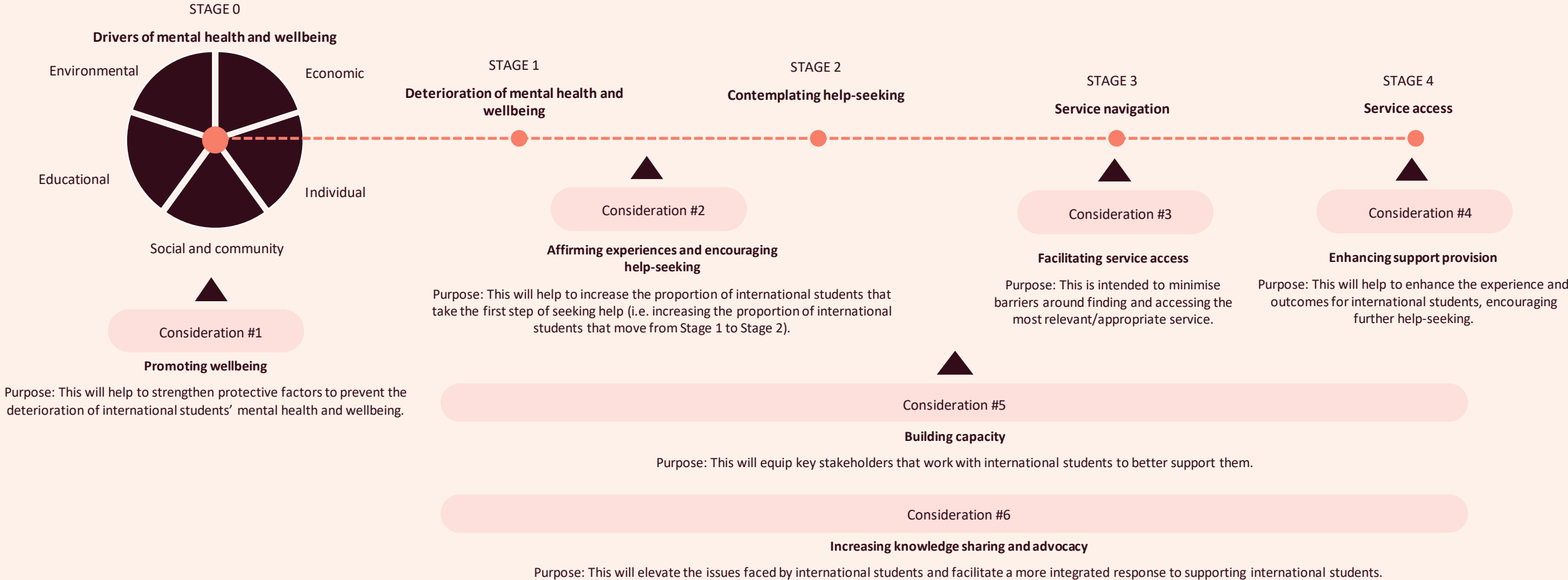
The key insights from across the interviews and workshops are summarised below according to the help-seeking journey of international students.



1. World Health Organisation, 2023, Social Determinants of Health <https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health>

# SUMMARY FINDINGS – OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

The opportunities for change identified to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of international students and reduce the risk of suicide are summarised below according to 6 broad considerations:



Opportunities for change within each of the categories above are further explored in the journey maps

# JOURNEY MAPS

## Overview

The international students consulted as part of this project all demonstrated remarkable levels of courage and resilience by moving to Australia and overcoming significant challenges, both personal and systemic. Their determination and commitment to make a positive contribution to Australia were consistently present in every discussion.

Eight journey maps were produced in total. Each is based on fictional characters but deeply informed by the 20 interviews conducted with international students and consultations undertaken with other stakeholders. An overview of each journey map is outlined on this page.

## Amal (she/her)

Amal is a 21-year-old Pakistani international student studying a Diploma of Business Management at a private college in Melbourne.

She has struggled with ADHD-like symptoms, such as difficulty with planning, organisation and concentrating, but has not been formally diagnosed and has not sought support for this prior to coming to Australia.

Amal was excited to come to Victoria and expand her knowledge and create a brighter future for herself.

Amal's parents were supportive of her move but did not have the capacity to support her financially.

## Lana (she/her)

Lana is a 22-year-old Malaysian international student, studying nursing at a university in Melbourne.

Lana was exposed to family violence throughout her childhood. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Lana provided care to her mother, who suffered from suicidality and attempted suicide on multiple occasions.

As a result of these traumatic experiences, Lana has experienced depression periodically through her life, although she has never sought professional support.

Lana had a history of self-medicating with alcohol during challenging times in Malaysia. She was ashamed of this and would do it in secret.

## Deshal (she/her)

Deshal is a 23-year-old Egyptian international student who came to Melbourne with her younger sibling to study a Bachelor of Commerce at a university. As the oldest sibling, Deshal's family expected her to look after her younger brother.

Deshal had never left home for an extended period or lived independently from her parents. She was nervous about coming to Australia and managing on her own.

Deshal has always felt pressure from her family to do well academically.

Deshal is not familiar with the concept of mental health and has not previously sought support for mental health challenges.

## Nima (they/them)

Nima is a 24-year-old from Russia studying a diploma of IT in Melbourne.

Nima has experienced severe anxiety in the past and sought professional support from a counsellor in Russia.

They also have a difficult dynamic with their parents, who don't affirm their gender identity.

Nima's plan to move to Australia was made complicated by the geopolitical situation in their home country, Russia. They struggled to obtain the necessary paperwork for their student visa. They also did not feel safe disclosing their mental health challenges for fear their visa would be rejected.

## Erik (he/him)

Erik is a 33-year-old mature-age international student from the UK studying a Diploma of Project Management in Melbourne. In his early twenties, Erik was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and has been seeing his psychologist regularly for the past 5 years.

Erik's father has a drug and alcohol addiction. Erik has previously had problems with alcohol too. Erik has previously had problems with alcohol, but has not sought formal support.

Erik puts himself under pressure to do well academically and support himself financially. He was excited about coming to Australia to make a fresh start and have some distance from complicated family relationships.

## Vidya (she/her)

Vidya is a 27-year-old international student from Bangladesh who moved to Melbourne with her partner, Idris to study science at a university in Melbourne.

Vidya and Idris both had good careers in Bangladesh and came to Australia together, pursuing further studies with the hope of finding work and starting a family. Vidya is close to her family back home.

Vidya has struggled with depression since high school. She never sought support for her mental health back home due to the shame she felt.

Vidya's depression has impacted her ability to connect and socialise with other people. Despite having each other, Vidya and Idris lack a broader support network in Victoria.

## Huy (he/him)

Huy is a 19-year-old international student born in Vietnam, currently studying a Bachelor of Accounting in Melbourne.

Huy was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in his late teens and started taking medication and seeing a psychiatrist to manage his symptoms several years before moving to Victoria.

Huy is naturally social and was excited to make new friends in Australia.

However, Huy also felt anxious about the financial burden placed on his family in order to support his overseas study.

## Zhou (he/him)

Zhou is a 34-year-old international student studying at an English language school in Melbourne.

Zhou was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at a young age. Zhou did not access ongoing support following his diagnosis.

He has not previously experienced mental health conditions or sought help.

It took a long time for Zhou to convince his parents to let him move to Australia.

Zhou has a strong level of distrust towards governments and authorities. This distrust means that Zhou is always wary about his activities being monitored and shared with the Australian Government and concerned that it will be used against him.

# JOURNEY MAPS

## How to read

The journey maps are designed to provide a visual overview of the experiences of international students living in Victoria and their interactions with key service systems.

Each journey map comprises 3 distinct components to provide a holistic overview of the student's experience.

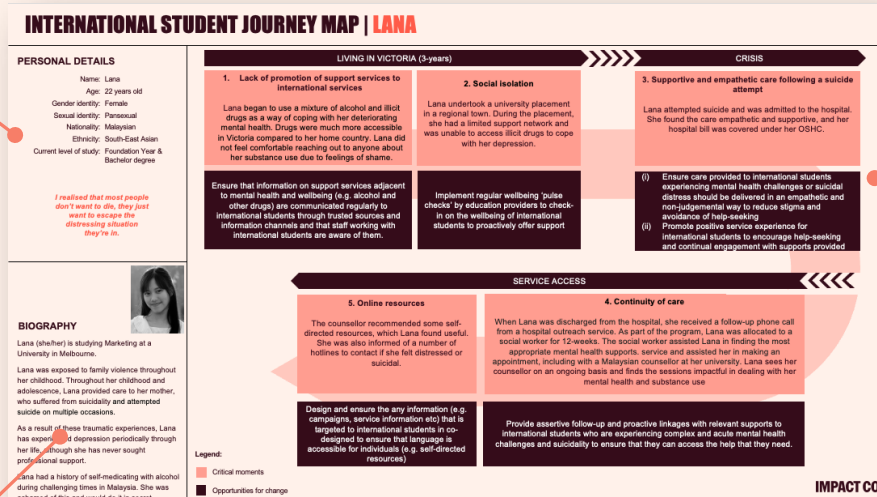
### Personal details

This section provides an overview of the key demographic details of the international student, including:

- name
- age
- gender identity
- sexual identity
- nationality
- course.

### Biography

This section provides context on each international student.



### User journey

The journey map is a chronological depiction of the international student's journey in Victoria. The maps outline how long students have been living in Victoria when events occur. The following information is highlighted for each journey map:

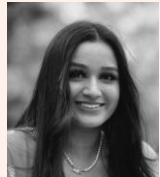
- Critical moments – are important points throughout the journeys that define their experiences.
- Opportunities for change – are areas for potential intervention to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of international students in Victoria.

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | AMAL

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Amal  
 Age: 21  
 Gender identity: Female  
 Sexual identity: Heterosexual  
 Nationality: Pakistani  
 Current level of study: Diploma

“  
*I just couldn't afford it. I wanted to keep seeing the psychiatrist, but it was that or not eating for the next week. There was no option.*  
 ”



## BIOGRAPHY

Amal (she/her) is studying a Diploma of Business Management at a private college in Melbourne.

She has struggled with ADHD-like symptoms, such as difficulty with planning, organisation and concentrating, but has not been formally diagnosed and has not sought support for this prior to coming to Australia.

Amal was excited to come to Victoria and expand her knowledge and create a brighter future for herself.

Amal's parents were supportive of her move but did not have the capacity to support her financially.

## LIVING IN VICTORIA (8 months)

### 1. Financial pressure

Amal felt stressed financially, as her parents could not afford to support her in Australia. Since arriving, Amal hadn't been able to secure a job.

### 2. Traumatic experience

Amal was sexually assaulted by a staff member at her college during her first week in Victoria, creating extreme distress.

### 3. Lack of sexual health information

Following the sexual assault, Amal wanted to have an STI screen, but she didn't know where to go or how much it would cost.

### 4. Isolation from peers

Amal thought she would be able to easily make friends with other international students from Pakistan. She was surprised to find herself being discriminated against and judged by her peers from her home country due to the differences in background socioeconomic status. This created further distress.

Create a centralised website/digital hub to be a source of truth for international students, which includes information on finding employment, financial counselling and supports for sexual assault.

Provide training and resources to staff at education institutes to provide linkages to social groups and strengthen social connections.

Continuously promote mental health, wellbeing and wider supports that are available to international students through channels and sources engaged with frequently by international students

Undertake local, place-based campaigns to promote the benefits of multiculturalism and educate Victorians and student peers on the impact of racism and discrimination on international students.

## SERVICE ACCESS

### 7. Variation and unclear information on OSHC inclusions

Amal was shocked when she had to pay a significant out-of-pocket cost for an ADHD assessment and ongoing supports. Amal decided not to seek any further ongoing support for her ADHD due to the prohibitive and expensive costs associated.

Advocate for OSHC providers to explain their offerings in a simple and easy-to-understand manner for international students.

### 6. Poor information sharing

The counsellor suspected that Amal had undiagnosed ADHD and referred her to a GP for another referral to a psychologist to obtain a formal diagnosis. This process included providing general context to her GP about her life in Australia. Amal found it very challenging to retell the story of her sexual assault and the other challenges she had gone through while in Victoria. This made the process daunting and distressing for her.

Strengthen referral pathways and information sharing between organisations that work with international students to ensure continuity of care.

### 5. Varying level of support for international students

The combination of Amal's trauma, isolation from peers and financial stress led to frequent thoughts of ending her life. Amal contacted her institution and was only able to see an external wellbeing counsellor (not available onsite) after 3 weeks, due to limited resources at her small institution.

Establish regular cross-sector communities of practice or a knowledge-sharing/networking event to bring together key stakeholders that support international students to share ideas and learnings, including the types of support that are offered to international students.

Legend:

■ Critical moments

■ Opportunities for change

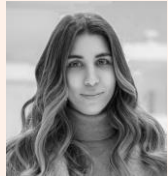
# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | DESHAL

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Deshal  
Age: 23 years old  
Gender identity: Female  
Sexual identity: Heterosexual  
Nationality: Egyptian  
Current level of study: Bachelor degree

“ *I don't know much about mental health because of my home country's environment, but I know it can develop into a lifelong illness. At the moment, it's fine, I just feel stressed out. I think I have the ability to bear it and overcome it.* ”

## BIOGRAPHY



Deshal (she/her) came to Melbourne with her younger sibling (he/him) to study a Bachelor of Commerce at a university. As the oldest sibling, Deshal's family expected her to look after her younger brother.

Deshal had never left home for an extended period or lived independently from her parents. She was nervous about coming to Australia and managing on her own.

Deshal has always felt pressure from her family to do well academically.

Deshal is not familiar with the concept of mental health and has not previously sought support for mental health challenges.

## LIVING IN VICTORIA (1 year)

### 1. New to living independently

Deshal struggled with living away from her parents for the first time and looking after herself and her brother.

### 2. Different approaches to learning

Deshal struggled academically due to the different learning style and did not do well in her studies during her first year.

### 3. Pressure from family

When Deshal spoke about her struggles at university, her parents told her to work hard and reminded her that they had made a significant investment in sending her to study overseas.

### 4. Deteriorating mental health

The combination of living independently for the first time, adapting to new ways of learning and the pressure from her parents led to constant stress and frequent panic attacks.

### 5. Limited mental health literacy

Deshal didn't know what panic attacks were or why she was experiencing them, and her parents dissuaded her from seeking help. Deshal only started to consider seeking help when her panic attacks became more frequent and severe.

Create a centralised website/digital hub to be a source of truth for international students, which includes information on common challenges for international students settling into Australia, such as living independently, homesickness and how to foster healthy dynamics with parents.

Design and implement awareness-raising campaigns to promote wellbeing, increase international students' understanding of mental health and loneliness, reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking, using stories from international students.

## HELP-SEEKING

### 7. Need for more peer support

Deshal eventually decided to seek formal support by accessing the university counsellor. When Deshal went to the wellbeing office, there were no individuals Deshal felt she could identify with. She wished she was able to speak to another international student for advice and support.

Design and deliver peer support programs for international students, including embedding international student peer workers within wellbeing services at education institutes.

### 6. Peers encouraging help-seeking

Deshal was initially hesitant to seek help. But after speaking to her friend who is also an international student about his experience with mental health and accessing help, she started to change her mind.

Engage international students as peer educators/navigators to deliver information sessions on mental health and wellbeing and seeking support, to help combat stigma and encourage help-seeking.

Legend:

■ Critical moments

■ Opportunities for change

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | ERIK

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Erik  
Age: 33 years old  
Gender identity: Male  
Sexual identity: Queer  
Nationality: British  
Current level of study: Diploma

“  
*Being in Australia on my own has been so challenging. I feel like I don't have anyone to lean on and can barely keep afloat, managing studying and supporting myself financially.*  
”



## BIOGRAPHY

Erik (he/him) is studying a Diploma of Project Management in Melbourne.

In his early twenties, Erik was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and has been seeing his psychologist regularly for the past 5 years.

Erik's father has a drug and alcohol addiction. Erik has previously had problems with alcohol, but has not sought formal support.

Erik puts himself under pressure to do well academically and support himself financially.

He was excited about coming to Australia to make a fresh start and have some distance from complicated family relationships.

## LIVING IN VICTORIA (1 year)

### 1. Lack of social connections

Starting his diploma at 33, Erik found being a mature-age student challenging. Erik didn't know anyone in Victoria and felt lonely and isolated. He found it challenging to engage with domestic students or international students, as he is not an 'obvious' international student coming from an English-speaking country. Additionally, most of the social activities organised by his TAFE were targeted at younger undergraduate students.

### 2. Challenges juggling work and studies

Erik was a full fee-paying student and struggled to balance part-time work and performing well academically.

### 3. Challenging events in home country

Erik's father passed away unexpectedly suddenly from a drug overdose. Erik couldn't afford flights home to visit his family. He felt increasingly lonely and isolated and experienced low moods. Erik started drinking alcohol to cope after a period of not drinking.

Provide training and resources to staff at education institutes to provide linkages to social groups and strengthen social connections.

Create a centralised website/digital hub to be a source of truth for international students, which includes information on common challenges for international students settling into Australia, such as finding employment, living independently, homesickness and information on financial counselling and alcohol and other drug support services.

## SERVICE ACCESS

### 5. Education staff knowledge of available supports

Erik spoke to a lecturer who he trusts about his support options. His lecturer referred him to free online mental health supports. Erik found the online resources helpful, but didn't feel they were sufficient to manage his mental health challenges and addiction.

### 4. Lack of promotion of available supports

Due to his previous help-seeking experience in the UK, Erik decided to seek mental health supports. Erik did not feel comfortable speaking to the wellbeing counsellor at his TAFE, but was not aware of any other external support services.

Promote available mental health and wellbeing supports for international students to education providers and relevant health providers at regular intervals.

Continuously promote mental health and wellbeing supports that are available to international students through channels and sources engaged with frequently by international students.

Legend:

Critical moments

Opportunities for change



# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | HUY

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Huy  
 Age: 19 years old  
 Gender identity: Male  
 Sexual identity: Heterosexual  
 Nationality: Vietnamese  
 Current level of study: Bachelor degree

“ *There was a lot of information from the university about wellbeing, but I didn't know how to see a doctor.* ”

## BIOGRAPHY

Huy (he/him) is a 19-year-old student studying a Bachelor of Accounting in Melbourne.

Huy was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in his late teens and started taking medication and seeing a psychiatrist to manage his symptoms several years before moving to Victoria.

Huy is naturally social and was excited to make new friends in Australia.

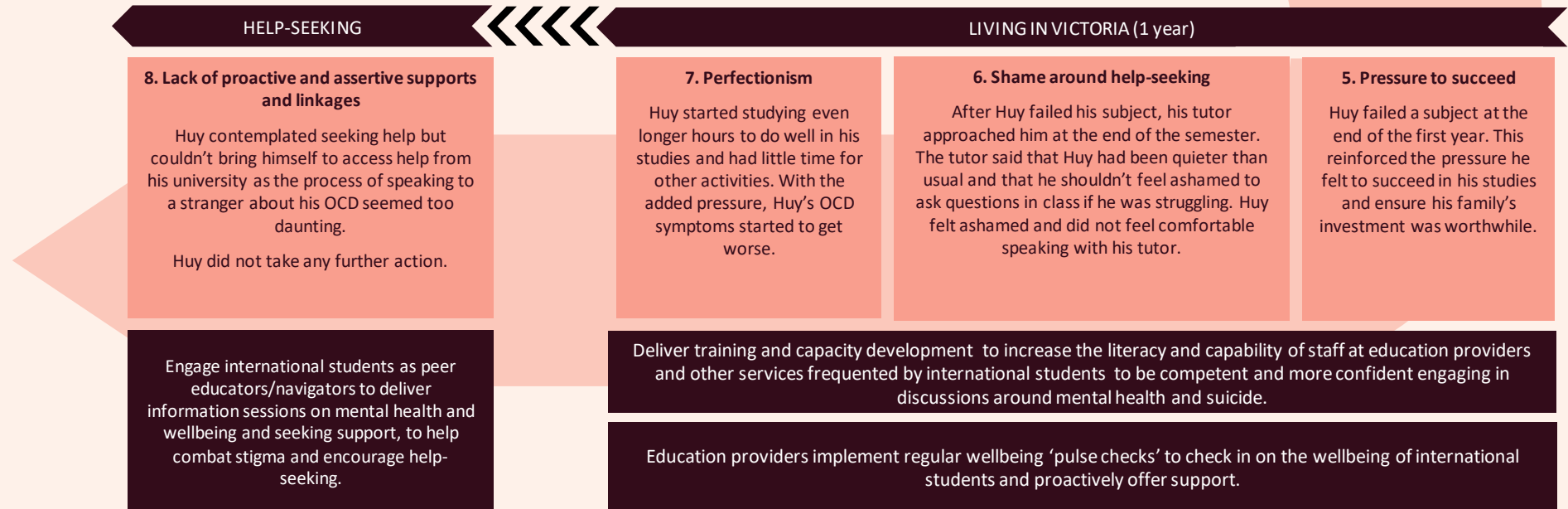
However, Huy also felt anxious about the financial burden placed on his family in order to support his overseas study.



Legend:

■ Critical moments

■ Opportunities for change





# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | LANA

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Lana  
 Age: 22 years old  
 Gender identity: Female  
 Sexual identity: Pansexual  
 Nationality: Malaysian  
 Ethnicity: South-East Asian  
 Current level of study: Foundation Year & Bachelor degree

“ *I realised that most people don't want to die, they just want to escape the distressing situation they're in.* ”



## BIOGRAPHY

Lana (she/her) is studying nursing at a university in Melbourne.

Lana was exposed to family violence throughout her childhood. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Lana provided care to her mother, who suffered from suicidality and attempted suicide on multiple occasions.

As a result of these traumatic experiences, Lana has experienced depression periodically through her life, although she has never sought professional support.

Lana had a history of self-medicating with alcohol during challenging times in Malaysia. She was ashamed of this and would do it in secret.

## LIVING IN VICTORIA (3 years) >>>>>

**1. Lack of promotion of support services to international services**

Lana was studying in Victoria and experiencing deteriorating mental health. She began to use a mixture of alcohol and illicit drugs, which were much more accessible in Victoria compared to her home country, to cope. Lana did not feel comfortable reaching out to anyone about her substance use due to feelings of shame.

Continuously promote mental health and wellbeing supports that are available to international students through channels and sources engaged with frequently by international students.

**2. Social isolation**

Lana undertook a university placement in a regional town. During the placement, she had a limited support network and was unable to access illicit drugs to cope with her depression.

Education providers implement regular wellbeing 'pulse checks' to check in on the wellbeing of international students and proactively offer support.

## CRISIS

**3. Supportive and empathetic care following a suicide attempt**

Lana attempted suicide and was admitted to hospital. She found the care empathetic and supportive, and her hospital bill was covered under her OSHC.

Promote empathetic, non-judgemental and safe communication about mental health and suicide in services and settings that international students frequent.

## ←←←←← SERVICE ACCESS

**5. Online resources**

The counsellor recommended some self-directed resources, which Lana found useful. She was also informed of a number of hotlines to contact if she felt distressed or suicidal.

Design and deliver a set of self-directed supports for international students to address their mental health and wellbeing needs, or during wait times for appointments.

**4. Continuity of care**

When Lana was discharged from hospital, she received a follow-up phone call from hospital aftercare service that provides follow-up care to people following a suicide attempt for up to 12 weeks. As part of the program, Lana was allocated to a lived experience peer worker and a wellbeing support worker for 12 weeks. The peer worker provided a shared understanding of suicidality and hope for recovery. The wellbeing worker helped Lana to find the most appropriate mental health supports and make an appointment, including with a Malaysian counsellor at her university. Lana sees her counsellor regularly and finds the sessions useful in helping her deal with her mental health and substance use.

Provide access to proactive aftercare services with relevant supports and community linkages to international students who are experiencing suicidality.

Legend:

■ Critical moments

■ Opportunities for change

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | NIMA

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Nima  
 Age: 24 years old  
 Gender identity: Non-binary  
 Sexual identity: Queer  
 Nationality: Russian  
 Current level of study: Diploma

“ *When I was going through the visa application process, I didn't want to be untruthful, but your application can be denied based on having poor mental health. I couldn't talk to the doctor about it.* ”



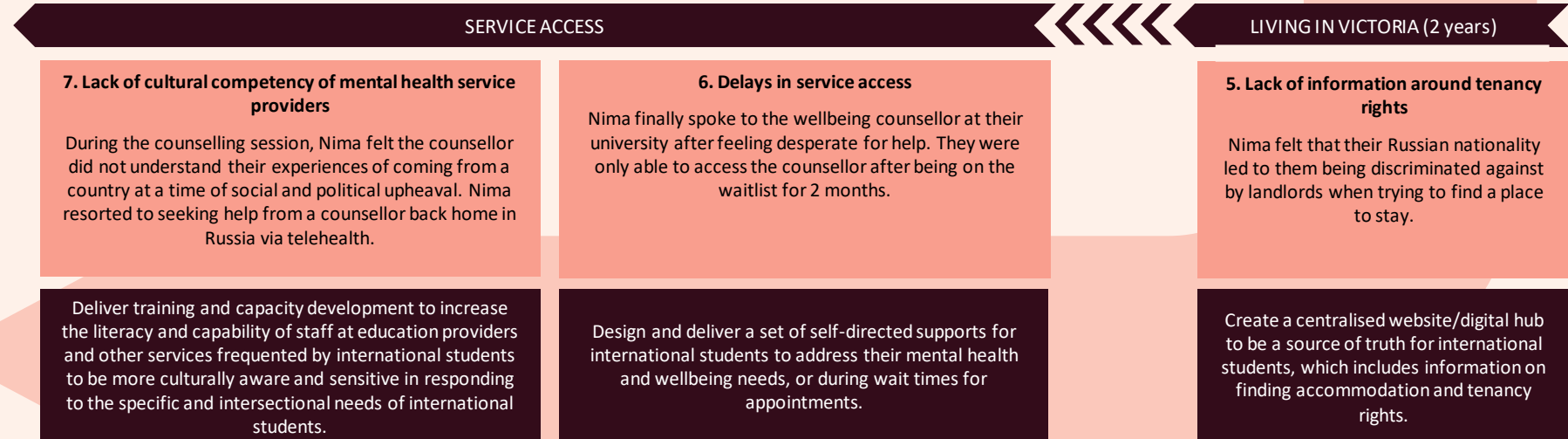
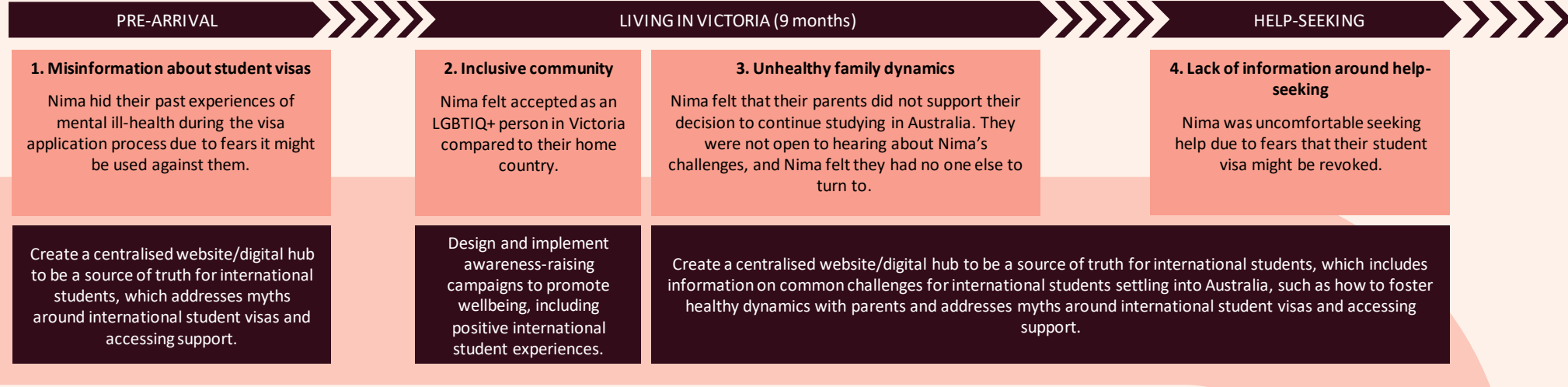
## BIOGRAPHY

Nima (they/them) is studying a Diploma of IT in Melbourne.

Nima has experienced severe anxiety in the past and sought professional support from a counsellor in Russia.

They also have a difficult dynamic with their parents, who don't affirm their gender identity.

Nima's plan to move to Australia was made complicated by the geopolitical situation in their home country, Russia. They struggled to obtain the necessary paperwork for their student visa. They also did not feel safe disclosing their mental health challenges for fear their visa would be rejected.



Legend:

Critical moments

Opportunities for change

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | VIDYA

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Vidya  
 Age: 27 years old  
 Gender identity: Female  
 Sexual identity: Heterosexual  
 Nationality: Bangladeshi  
 Current level of study: Masters

“  
*Being vulnerable is difficult in times like this, where you have to shed your ego to reach out to someone, it is so difficult.*  
 ”

## BIOGRAPHY

Vidya (she/her) moved to Melbourne with her partner, Idris (he/him), to study science at a university in Melbourne.

Vidya and Idris both had good careers in Bangladesh and came to Australia together, pursuing further studies with the hope of finding work and starting a family. Vidya is close to her family back home.

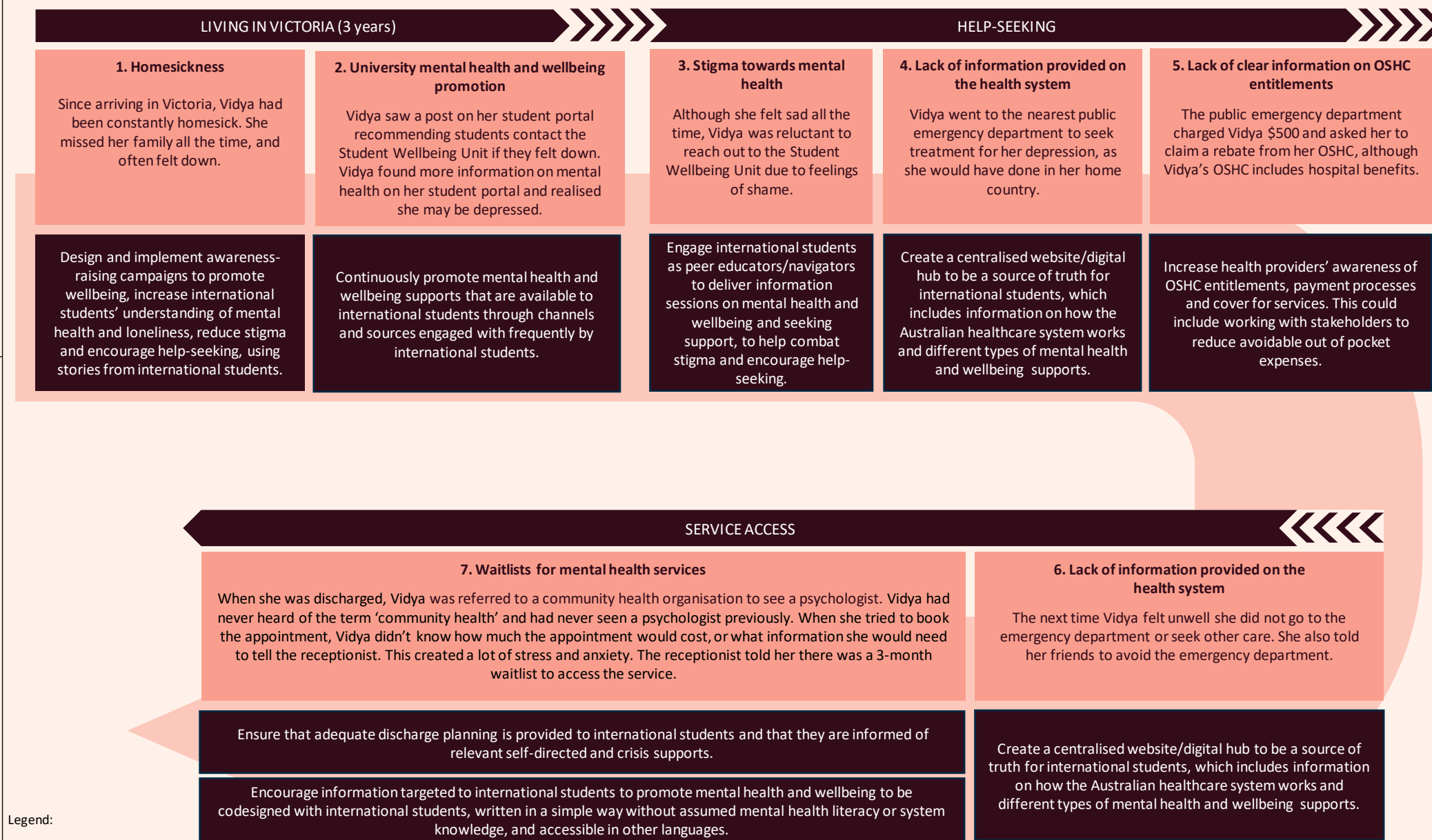
Vidya has struggled with depression since high school. She never sought support for her mental health back home due to the shame she felt.

Vidya’s depression has impacted her ability to connect and socialise with other people. Despite having each other, Vidya and Idris lack a broader support network in Victoria.



Legend:

- Critical moments
- Opportunities for change



# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY MAP | ZHOU

## PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: Zhou  
 Age: 34 years old  
 Gender identity: Male  
 Sexual identity: Heterosexual  
 Nationality: Chinese  
 Current level of study: English Language School

“  
*The supervisor at my work is a bully. As a casual employee, I can't prove it or do anything about it.*  
 ”

## BIOGRAPHY



Zhou (he/him) is studying at an English language school in Melbourne.

Zhou was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at a young age. Zhou did not access ongoing support following his diagnosis.

He has not previously experienced mental health conditions or sought help.

It took a long time for Zhou to convince his parents to let him move to Australia.

Zhou has a strong level of distrust towards governments and authorities. This distrust means that Zhou is always wary about his activities being monitored and shared with the Australian Government and concerned that it will be used against him.

## LIVING IN VICTORIA (1.5 years)

### 1. Language barriers

Zhou had a limited level of English fluency. As a result, he struggled to integrate into Victoria and mainly socialised with Mandarin speakers.

### 2. Lack of advice on housing and living arrangements

Zhou had a homestay arrangement when he arrived in Victoria, which lasted only one month. Zhou was unsure how to find permanent accommodation.

### 3. Lack of information and support to address workforce exploitation

Zhou started a part-time job in a factory. He worked unpaid hours, but his employer insisted it was normal practice in Australia. Zhou was too embarrassed to ask his friends and found it too difficult to verify elsewhere due to limited English literacy.

### 4. Racism

Zhou was called a racial slur in class one day. The experience made him feel very unsafe and unwelcome in Australia. This further reinforced his desire to only mix with people who spoke Mandarin.

Create a centralised website/digital hub to be a source of truth for international students, which includes information on making friends and social connections, finding accommodation and tenancy rights.

Undertake local, place-based campaigns (e.g. at education institutes) to promote the benefits of multiculturalism and educate Victorians and student peers on the impact of racism and discrimination on international students.

## HELP-SEEKING

## SERVICE ACCESS

## HELP-SEEKING

### 8. Informal support

Zhou joined a local Chinese church group. He was able to confide in other members of the group about his negative experience at work and anxiety. They listened to Zhou and provided helpful guidance on finding a new job.

Provide training and resources to staff at education institutes to provide linkages to social groups and strengthen social connections.

### 7. Lack of mental health capacity building for interpreters

Zhou felt the interpreter didn't have a good understanding of mental health based on their interpretation of the counsellor. They also frequently said that Zhou's experience 'wasn't that bad'.

Promote the use of interpreters with mental health literacy for international students seeking support, particularly for mental health and wellbeing.

### 6. Limited availability of interpreters

Zhou finally reached out to the student wellbeing service and requested a Mandarin-speaking counsellor. He had to wait for 8 weeks due to difficulties finding a suitable interpreter.

### 5. Lack of information/misinformation about visa requirements

Zhou began feeling stressed and anxious about his work situation and wanted to seek help for his mental health. But he was worried that the Australian Government would be notified of his mental health challenges and that this would impact his ability to continue his studies in Victoria.

Encourage relevant educational and mental health service providers to reinforce the confidentiality of accessing supports and that help-seeking will not affect their student visa, ability to continue studying or future employment prospects.

Legend:

■ Critical moments

■ Opportunities for change