

GLOBAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

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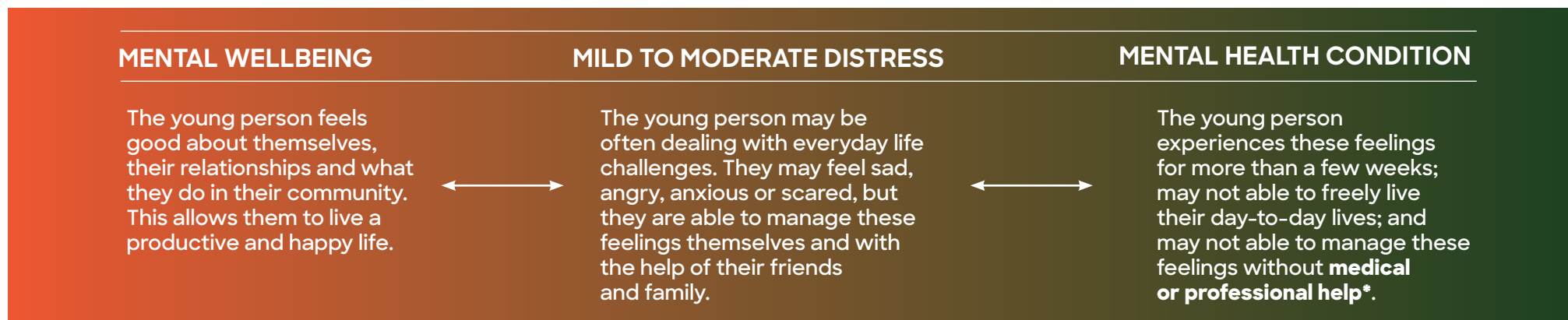
INTRODUCTION

A significant proportion of young people (aged 12–25) around the world are experiencing mental health challenges. Youth mental ill-health is a significant global issue that needs local action. This resource provides information for people around the world to communicate with their community leaders about improving mental health care for young people in their country. It is intended for anyone interested in advocating for better mental health care, including people who have never been involved in advocacy before, as well as those who have.

This resource was developed by Orygen, an Australian youth mental health organisation, and co-produced with a youth advisory group. Orygen sought feedback from more than 150 people (including 100 young people) in more than 15 countries to identify how different groups of people understand mental ill-health and what they think needs to be done to improve young people's mental health. These perspectives are included in this resource.



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?



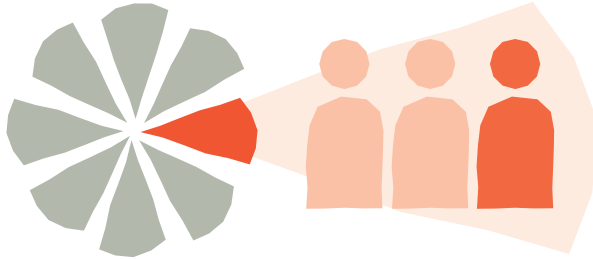
A person's mental health is how they feel, think and behave. Our mental health is affected by our genes, our life experiences (especially when we are young), our social interactions, and how we process our thoughts. Someone can be mentally healthy, have a mental health condition, and may be somewhere in between. People living with mental health conditions may recover and have moments of optimum mental health, while people without mental health diagnoses may also experience times of poor mental wellbeing. A good way to think about this is that mental health is a spectrum (see the image above).

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH?

People with a **mental health condition*** often experience significant difficulties in their lives. Their condition can make it difficult to go to school, have a job, and maintain good relationships. They are also likely to be **stigmatised*** and experience **discrimination***, being unfairly excluded in their community. If mental health conditions are not treated they can lead to serious harm, including the inability to care for themselves and death by **suicide***, which also has a big impact for friends and family. [You can read more about mental health and its impact in this helpful resource by the World Health Organisation.](#)



MENTAL HEALTH GLOBALLY



Around one in eight people in the world have a mental health disorder¹, but only around one in three of these people are able to seek professional help². One of the results of this is that around the world, more than 800,000 people die by suicide each year³.

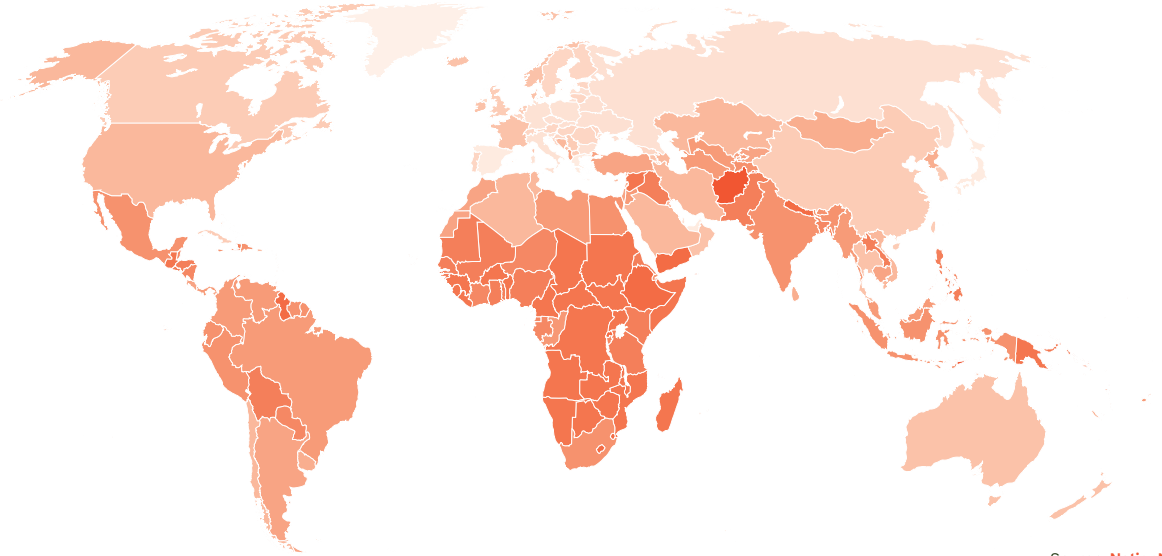
Providing young people with access to good mental health care is considered a **human right*** by most countries⁴. However, around one in three countries have no mental health **policy***⁵ and most countries spend less than 2 per cent of their **health budget*** on mental health⁶.

GLOBAL STATISTICS

Figure 1 shows the countries with the highest proportion of young people. Figure 2 shows the countries where there are youth mental health service models. These demonstrate that the countries with the highest proportion of young people have no youth mental health services.

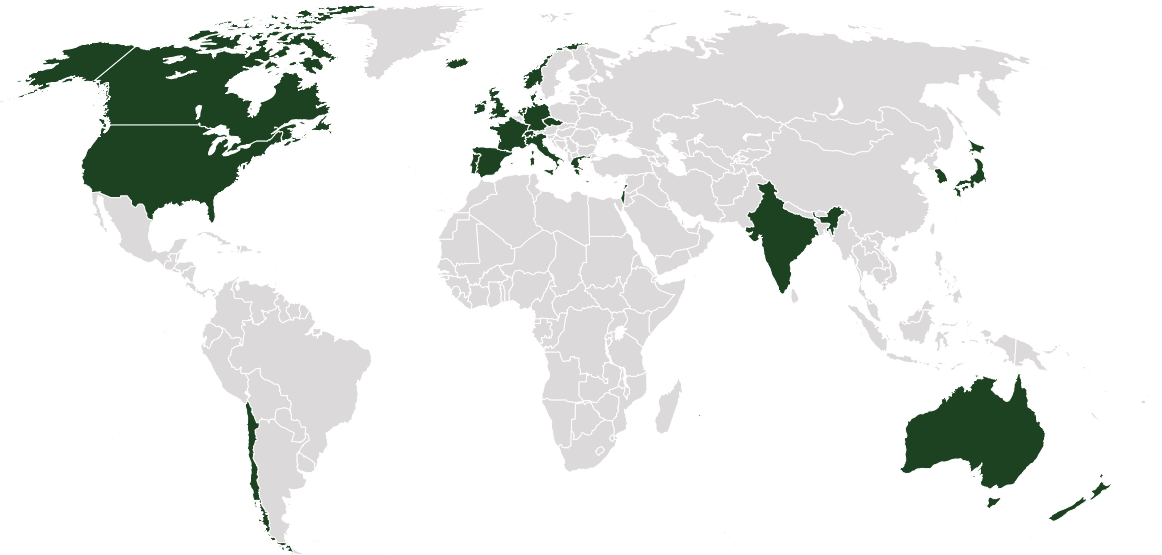
More information on the scale and impact of poor mental health in young people can be found in the Global Youth Mental Health briefing [which can be accessed here](#).

Figure 1: Proportion of population aged 15-24, 2020
(darker colours indicate higher proportion of young people per population)



Source: [NationMaster](#)

Figure 2: Countries where there are youth mental health service models identified in the project



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

To ensure that all young people are able to experience mental wellbeing, and access help when they need it, it is important that communities have good policies and provide enough money for mental health care. Advocacy is one way to make sure these things happen. Advocacy involves communicating with community leaders about improving mental health care for young people in your local area or your country. You can advocate in many different ways. For example, you can join a group in your community that is working on mental health, speak directly to your community leaders about mental health, or organise a group of people in your community to talk about mental health. This resource provides some information and tools to help you do youth mental health advocacy.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

This section outlines a number of important activities that are helpful to do before starting your advocacy work. Your advocacy efforts will be more effective and sustainable if you think about safety, understand your advocacy context, and set some advocacy goals.

SAFETY IN MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

Thinking about your safety, and the safety of those you are working with, is very important in mental health advocacy. Depending on the type of advocacy you do, you will need to prepare to face some challenges in your work.

ADVOCATING THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

If you have **lived experience*** of mental ill-health personally, or as a carer or family member, it will be important to think about how much information you are comfortable sharing about your experience. For example, sharing personal details about yourself with other people can have a big impact, inspiring others to speak out and do advocacy. But you should be aware that people can use this sensitive information against you. People may also react differently to the information you share, so you may have to consider the **audience*** you are sharing with.

If you do not want to tell your story publicly, you should make sure that the people you are working with understand this. If you do want to tell your story, it is important to consider how you tell it. These two resources from Jack.Org in Canada are helpful in [telling your story](#) and [doing so safely](#).

If you do not have lived experience of mental ill-health, you will need to consider the ways in which you talk about mental ill-health to make sure that your audience feels comfortable and that you are sharing other people's stories responsibly. For example, you may share the stories of others who have already shared their stories publicly, such as those on the [Speak Your Mind website](#).

OTHER SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Whether or not you have lived experience of mental ill-health, there are a number of other safety considerations to think about. Mental health advocacy can be very helpful for your community, but can also be very challenging.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF THESE SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ADVOCATING



Mental health advocacy can take a long time to be successful and can impact your own mental health. It is important that you look after yourself by taking a break and having a strong support team* around you, which will help to avoid burning out*, or getting overwhelmed.

During your advocacy, you may face discrimination based on your gender, sexuality, religion or many other personal factors, so it is important to know how to respond to these challenges.



A lot of advocacy is done online, and you should consider how you present yourself and what information you share so that others cannot take advantage of you. [These free videos by Advocacy Assembly](#) provide ideas for thinking about safety in advocacy, especially online.

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORING YOUR ADVOCACY EXPERIENCE

Understanding your advocacy experience and skills can be helpful in planning your first steps in youth mental health advocacy. Below are some simple questions to help identify your advocacy capabilities.

Have you ever spoken about a social issue with people in your community?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Do you know who your community and national leaders are?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you ever contacted or met with a community leader about a social issue?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you organised a group in your community before?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you been a part of or organised a campaign on a social issue before?	✓ Yes	✗ No

Based on your answers, you can use the [advocacy activities table](#) in the next section to begin your advocacy work. As a guide, if you answered yes to:

- 0-1 questions, you might start by doing level one activities,
- 2-3 questions, you might start by doing level two activities,
- 4-5 questions, you might start by doing level three activities.

WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Understanding what is currently being done for youth mental health in your local area or country can help you work out what advocacy work you need to do. Below are some simple things you can do to explore what is happening.

- Find out if there is a youth mental health policy or strategy in your area.
- Check if there are any groups advocating for youth mental health in your area.
- Find out what help young people in your area can get if they are experiencing mental ill-health, and if more help is needed, or if this help can be improved.

Many of these things can be found out by asking your community leader, or searching on the internet. For example, the [World Health Organisation's MiNDbank](#) provides mental health information on most countries in the world. To get a more detailed understanding of what is currently happening in your community, you can also use the information and tools in [this document \(pages 30-44\) published by the World Health Organisation](#).

GOAL SETTING

Setting goals is important in advocacy, as they will show you if the work you are doing is effective, or if you need to change your approach. Your goals will depend on your advocacy capabilities, what is currently happening in your community, and the activities you decide to do. Once you have read through this resource, and particularly the [advocacy activities table](#) below, and know what type of advocacy you would like to do, you can come back to this section and set some goals. Information and tools such as [this one from the World Health Organisation \(pages 60-61\)](#) and [this one from Jack.org](#) can help you set good goals.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Once you have prepared yourself to do your advocacy, the next thing to do is plan what type of advocacy to do, and how you will do it. This section provides guidance on some of the main things you will need to consider in planning and doing your advocacy work, including identifying and engaging key decision-makers, deciding on advocacy activities, and accessing tools and templates to help you in your advocacy.

MAKING THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Before you start engaging in your advocacy, it is helpful to think about how you will show people that addressing youth mental health challenges is important. People in your community, and especially community leaders, are unlikely to do anything about youth mental health unless they understand the size of the issue.

Making a strong **case for change*** will mean that people are more likely to pay attention to the problem you are trying to solve, and listen to your plans for addressing it. The information and resources below can help you make a strong case for why youth mental health is an important issue.

GLOBAL RESOURCES

- [Our World In Data - mental health](#)
- [World Health Organisation - mental health factsheets](#)
- [World Health Organisation - global mental health report card](#)

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- [World Health Organisation's MiNDbank](#)
- [World Economic Forum and Orygen Global Youth Mental Health briefing](#)
- Your national government will likely have statistics about youth mental health in your country. These statistics will usually be presented in reports published by the Ministry of Health or Department of Health.

IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING KEY DECISION-MAKERS

When thinking about what advocacy you want to do, it is important to understand who is responsible for making decisions and how they are made on a personal, community and national level. You may already have a good idea of who makes decisions and how from your experience of following your community's affairs. If not, a simple way to find out is to start asking people you know, especially if they are already involved in youth mental health, or do a simple internet search on youth mental health in your community. If you want to get a more detailed understanding of the different people and groups involved in youth mental health in your community and how they act, system (or actor) mapping is a very helpful tool. System mapping will also help identify the gaps in your community that need to be addressed, giving you a good understanding of how you can help improve mental health care for young people. [This simple system mapping toolkit](#) can help you get started and [this more advanced actor mapping guide](#) can help you take it to the next level.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Once you have created a case for change and understand who your audience is, it is time to work out what advocacy activities you will do. The [table below](#) provides some ideas to help you think about possible activities. Activities are organised from left-to-right by the audience type, with more local activities on the left and more national and global activities on the right. They are also organised from top-to-bottom by the amount of time, experience, and support needed. Activities at the top need less of these things, and activities at the bottom need more. If you are new to youth mental health advocacy and want to do some local advocacy with a small group of people, you might start somewhere in the top-left of the table. Throughout the table are a number of helpful resources you can use to get started.



Table 1. Advocacy activities

AUDIENCES			
Personal network (e.g. friends, family, colleagues)	Wider community (e.g. schools, workplaces, local government)	National and international institutions (e.g. national health commissions, national human rights institutions)	Community and national leaders (e.g. national government and politicians, international human rights bodies)
LEVEL ONE: ACTIVITIES THAT NEED FEWER TIME AND RESOURCES			
<p>Start a conversation around mental health with someone you are concerned about. This tool provides some guidance on how to do so safely.</p> <p>Familiarise yourself with the signs of mental health conditions.</p> <p>Use social media platforms to combat stigma. For example, speak out about stigma or share your mental health story.</p>	<p>Write an article or blog about the importance of addressing youth mental health for your local newspaper or personal website</p> <p>Find potential mental health networks and organisations to collaborate with. Platforms such as Speak Your Mind and the Blue Print Group may assist with this.</p>	<p>Share information about changing mental health policies, such as the #chatsafe guidelines outlining safer ways to talk about suicide on social media.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the need to improve workplace mental health support by sharing resources, such as these key facts by the World Health Organisation</p>	<p>Tell your local community leader or representative that investing in mental health is important to you. For example, you could write them an email or letter, or tag them in a social media message.</p> <p>Attend a mental health protest or rally in your community.</p>
LEVEL TWO: ACTIVITIES THAT NEED MORE TIME AND RESOURCES			
<p>Participate in or raise funds for a mental health campaign, such as Movember or Sad Girls Club.</p> <p>Apply to do research on youth mental health in your country. Universities or your government may give out grants for this type of research.</p>	<p>Ask a local community group (for example, religious, sports or music groups) if you can talk about mental health at their next meeting.</p> <p>Plan a formal educational activity, such as an interactive workshop or a mental health pamphlet to distribute.</p>	<p>Start a petition for greater mental health funding. For example, using change.org.</p> <p>Create a social media campaign highlighting the barriers to mental health services in your community. For example, by getting people to share their stories online.</p> <p>Speak to someone at your school, university, workplace, religious group or sports club about creating a youth mental health policy.</p>	<p>Organise a meeting with your local community leader or representative to talk about addressing mental health.</p> <p>Advocate for funding to go to youth mental health services. For example, you may make a submission to your local or national government, or start a public campaign about the need for funding.</p>
LEVEL THREE: ACTIVITIES THAT NEED A LOT OF TIME AND RESOURCES			
<p>Organise peer support groups. This resource is helpful in getting started.</p>	<p>Organise a community forum. This tool provides some good advice for starting community conversations.</p>	<p>Organise a group of companies and organisations in your community that will commit to addressing youth mental health.</p>	<p>Organise for a community leader or representative to visit a youth mental health service in your community or attend a youth mental health event.</p> <p>Organise a local or national youth mental health summit, such as this one by Jack.org in Canada.</p>

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

[Advocacy Assembly](#) - free online advocacy tools taught in English, Arabic and Farsi.

[Community Tool Box](#) - comprehensive resources for community-building and advocacy in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Farsi.

WHAT NOW?

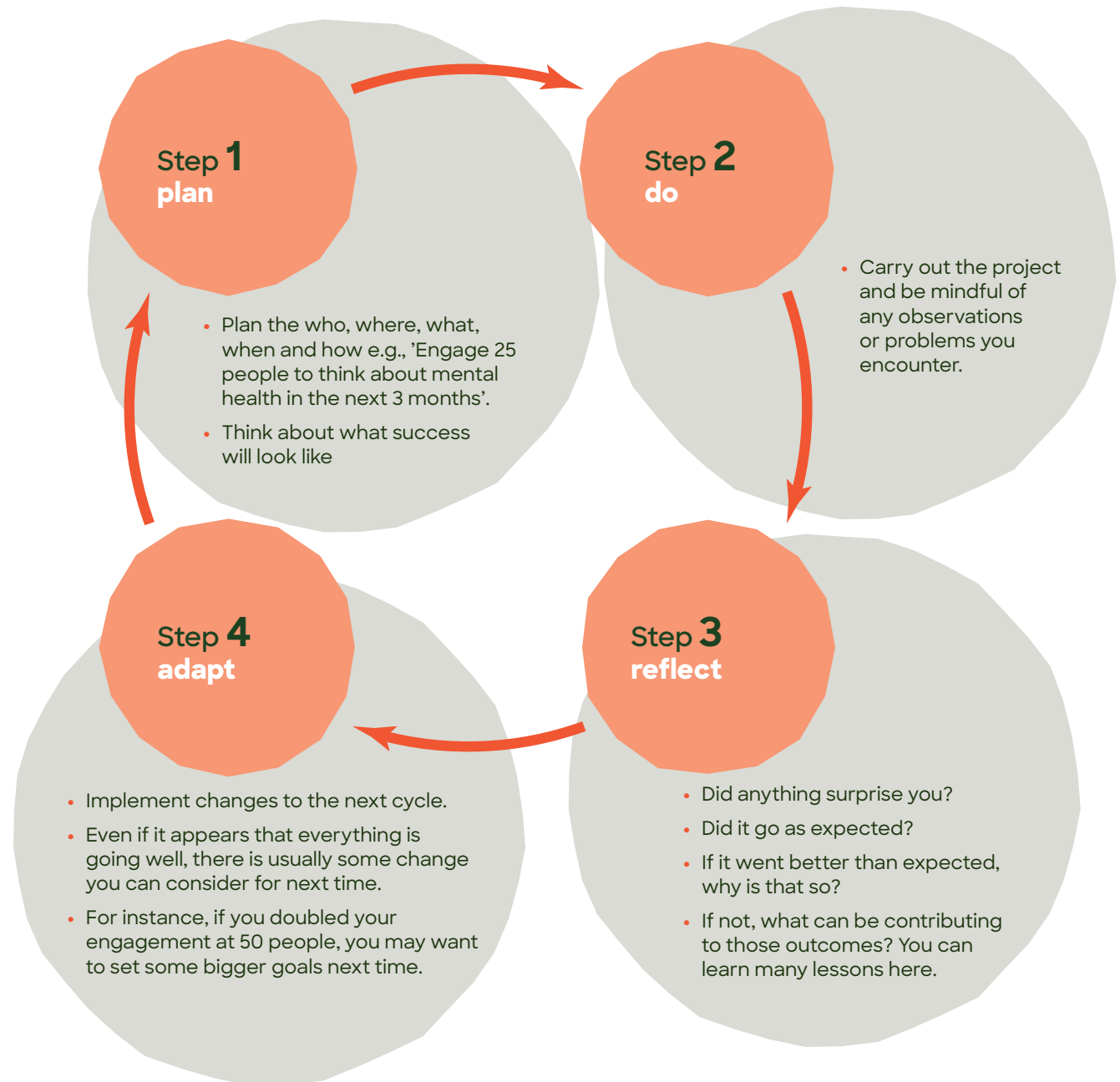
After doing some advocacy work, you may be wondering: “How did we do?”.

This is a very common question and we often want feedback on our performance. In fact, measuring our success can be one of the best ways to ensure sustainability. Other people want to learn from you and be inspired by your progress.

ASSESSING YOUR PROGRESS

There are many ways to assess your progress, although we will focus on the plan, do, reflect, adapt cycle (PDRA). We suggest this method because it is simple to use and helpful for many different types of advocacy.

Afterwards, you can go back to step one and repeat the cycle. By repeating the cycle, you can continuously improve your advocacy as you learn more about what works and what does not. Setting goals and refining them on an ongoing basis is part of this process.



ADVOCACY CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU START

- Have you thought about safety?

- Have you assessed the status?

- Have you set goals?

DURING THE ADVOCACY

- Take a look at the key facts!

- Have you engaged key decision makers?

- Equip yourself with tools and templates!

AFTER THE ADVOCACY

- What is progress to you?

- Have you assessed progress?

- Share your advocacy story!



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DEFINITIONS

Audience: the type of people you will mainly be speaking to and trying to influence. For example, if you are trying to raise awareness of youth mental health among families in your community, your audience may be parents of young people aged 10-25.

Budget: a document setting out the expected income (money coming in) and expenditure (money being spent) in one year. In government, the budget normally reflects the social and political priorities.

Burning out: a state of mind that occurs when you are stressed for long periods of time, which can make you feel helpless, hopeless, angry, tired and drained. [More information.](#)

Case for change: a set of arguments and information that show why it is important to do something. For example, a very simple but important case for change might be that there are very high suicide rates in the world. Suicide often occurs due to untreated mental ill-health; therefore, we should provide better mental health services so that less people take their own lives.

Discrimination: when someone treats a person in a negative way because of their mental ill-health. For example, someone experiencing mental ill-health might not get a job even though they are the best candidate.

Human rights: rights and freedoms that belong to us all because we are human. It is illegal to take these away from people. They are rights because they are things you are allowed to be, to do or to have.

Lived experience: personal knowledge, understanding or experience you get when you have lived through something. Mental health lived experience can mean personal experience of mental health challenges, navigating the mental health care system and/or supporting family or friends living with mental ill-health.

Medical or professional help: These are people who are trained to help people experiencing a mental health condition. They include school counsellors, family doctors and psychologists. Every professional is different and has their own style and personality.

Mental health condition: mental health conditions can affect anyone. They may change how we feel, think and act. They may be recognised when we, or someone we know, experience abnormal thoughts, feelings and behaviours that have become intense, been going for a while and are beginning to have a big impact on our daily lives. Some examples include anxiety, depression and schizophrenia.

Policy: a set of ideas or plans that guides how people make decisions, particularly those working in big organisations or governments. In government, these rules may be set out in laws, or documents such as policy frameworks for standards.

Stigma: when someone sees another person in a negative way because of their mental ill-health. For example, someone might be called 'dangerous', 'crazy' or 'incompetent' rather than unwell.

Suicide: suicide is complex. Suicide or suicidal thoughts are not a normal response to stress or sadness. Suicide is the deliberate taking of one's own life. The effects of youth suicide go beyond those that have died, impacting their parents, friends, peers and communities.

Support team: a group of people that you can trust to help you when you need support. For example, your support team might include close friends, family, carers or other advocates.

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