eheadspace
evaluation summary

Summary of the eheadspace evaluation framework 2025 - 2028

Introduction

headspace has a strong history and focus on continuous quality improvement and ensuring that its programs and services are underpinned and informed by evidence. headspace engages in a continuous cycle of building and using evidence, embedding monitoring, evaluation and learning activities in programs and services to strengthen their delivery and inform innovations in practice and design.

As with all headspace programs, eheadspace is committed to the evaluation of all aspects of service design and delivery to determine what works and what needs to be improved, and to demonstrate and enhance the contribution of eheadspace to mental health and wellbeing outcomes for young people, families and communities.

This document provides an overview of the eheadspace evaluation for the 2025 to 2028 period, including high-level information about the program, and the evaluation purpose, approach and process. Full details about the eheadspace evaluation, including the measurement framework, are included in the eheadspace evaluation framework 2025 – 2028.

headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

About eheadspace

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation (headspace) is an established and innovative provider of in-person, digital, and blended mental health and vocational services for young people and families in Australia. Each year, headspace helps thousands of young people and families access vital support through headspace centres in more than 160 communities, online and phone counselling services, vocational services, and services in schools. With a focus on early intervention, headspace provides tailored and holistic mental health support to 12 to 25-year-olds at a crucial time in their lives.

eheadspace is an integral component of the headspace digital mental health programs and services, providing a free and youth-friendly place for young people and their families to connect with mental health professionals and peer workers via live webchat, telephone and email, and access web-based content and resources. The program targets young people with low to moderate mental health concerns, with a particular focus on high-prevalence mental disorders, such as anxiety or depression. eheadspace addresses barriers to mental health support for young people who identify as First Nations, LGBTIQA+, multicultural, living in regional and remote areas, and living with disability.

Since the national rollout of the service in Australia in 2011, eheadspace has provided **more than 755,000 services to more than 231,000 young people and their families.**

About the eheadspace evaluation

Evaluation purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which eheadspace is meeting the needs and improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for young people, families and communities. The evaluation will contribute to learning for program improvement and innovation, an informed dialogue and evidence base for good practice in digital youth mental health services and strengthened accountability and advocacy to funders.

Evaluation approach

A blended theory-based and participatory approach informs the 2025 to 2028 eheadspace evaluation. eheadspace prioritises evaluation activities that provide opportunities for ethical, safe, and meaningful engagement with service users, ensuring the voices of young people and families are heard and used to inform service design and improvement, and further progress understanding of pathways to improved youth mental health and wellbeing.

The evaluation will be **theory-based,** testing our understanding of how and why eheadspace activities lead to outcomes for young people, families and communities. We will use **Theory of Change** and **program logic** tools that provide conceptual and visual representations of the relationships between eheadspace program elements.

A **participatory approach** will be embedded in the evaluation, recognising the importance of evaluators **working in partnership** with stakeholders to **co-create** evaluation activities and learnings. This ensures the evaluation is informed by subject-matter expertise and lived experience, contributes to a positive measurement culture and builds staff capacity.

Evaluation process

The eheadspace evaluation process features standard framing, design, implementation and reporting phases, commencing with a collaborative process to define program theory as the foundation to the blended theory-based participatory evaluation approach (Figure 1).

Examples of evaluation activities associated with each phase of the evaluation process are outlined below, and a detailed plan and timeline is included in the full eheadspace evaluation framework 2025 - 2028.

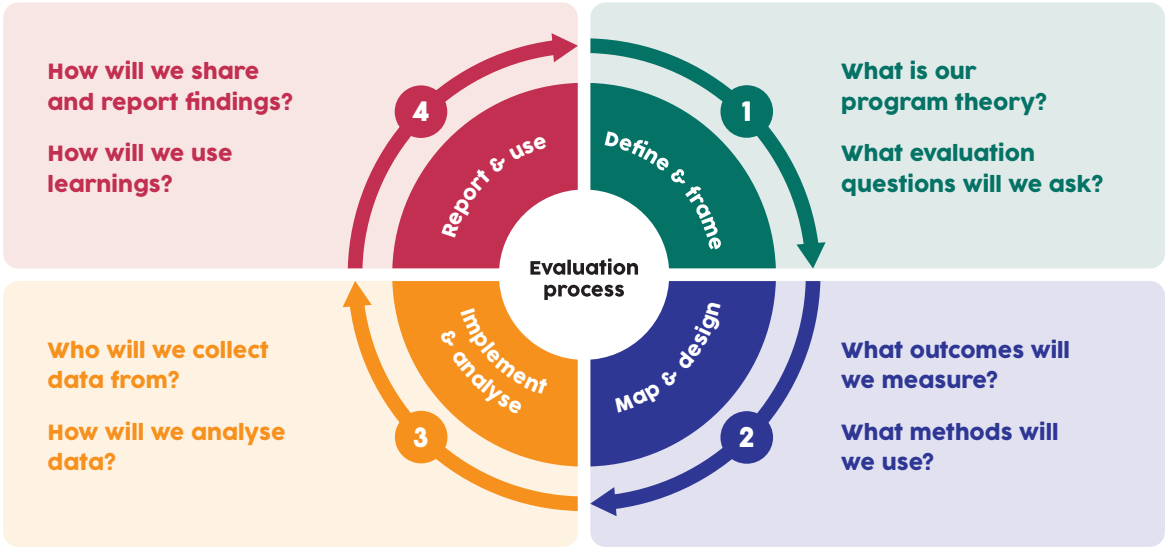


Figure 1. Phases of the eheadspace evaluation process

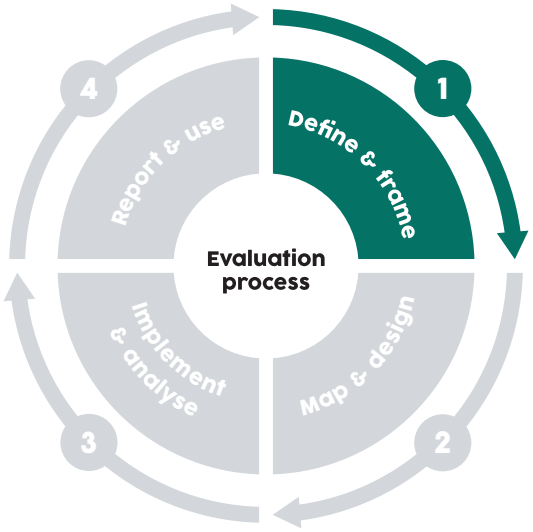
Phase 1

Define and frame

Theory-based approaches to evaluation aim to understand how and under what circumstances program activities lead to change. Program theory is defined and tested through the evaluation process, with learnings used to inform program improvement and innovation, as well as theory refinement.

headspace Digital Mental Health Programs (DMHP) staff worked in partnership with the Evaluation team to co-design a Theory of Change that articulates pathways from service activities to outcomes, underpinned by enablers, values and principles supporting the provision of good care to young people and families.

Iterative validation with research evidence, subject matter expertise, and over 150 stories of change from young people who received eheadspace support led to an overarching road map of how and why the integrated suite of headspace digital and online mental health and wellbeing programs contribute to change for young people, families, and communities (Appendix 1). Drawing on this Theory of Change, the eheadspace and Evaluation teams identified program elements to inform the co-creation of an eheadspace program logic (Appendix 2).



Working in consultation with the eheadspace team, the Evaluation team developed key evaluation questions designed to test the eheadspace program theory and demonstrate the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency and impact of eheadspace (Figure 2).

Relevance	• Is eheadspace reaching and engaging intended service users, service providers and partners? • To what extent is eheadspace designed and delivered to meet the needs of intended service users?
Effectiveness	• To what extent is eheadspace achieving its intended outcomes? • What are the strengths of eheadspace? • How could eheadspace be more effective? What are the opportunities for improvement and innovation?
Coherence	• To what extent is eheadspace integrated with and complementing other youth mental health programs and services in headspace and across the sector, contributing to a more integrated youth mental health system?
Efficiency	• To what extent is eheadspace delivering value for money, providing a cost-effective approach to contributing towards positive outcomes for young people and families?
Impact	• What difference is eheadspace making? What significant changes, positive or negative, intended or unintended, have occurred that can be attributed to eheadspace engagement?

Figure 2. eheadspace evaluation criteria and key evaluation questions

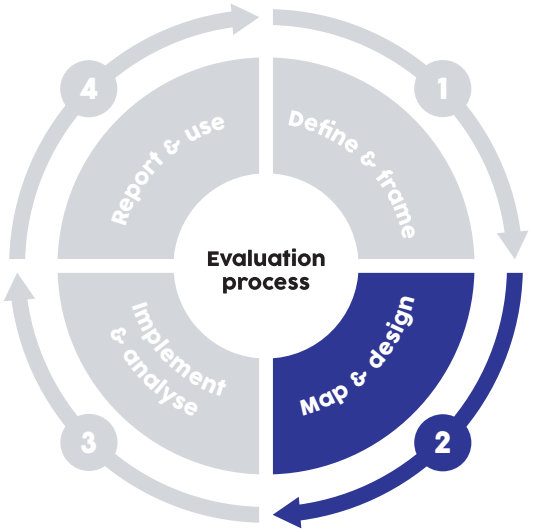
Phase 2

Map & design

The second phase of the evaluation includes an unpacking of program theory and mapping of program elements that require measurement, resulting in the co-creation of a measurement framework that outlines measures, proposed methods and data sources aligned with each evaluation question (measurement framework provided in the full eheadspace evaluation framework 2025 - 2028).

The measurement framework informs the design and evolution of an extensive minimum data set (DMHP MDS), an agreed set of data elements implemented for routine collection and reporting of service activities, service user engagements and characteristics.

The eheadspace measurement framework also informs the design of mixed-methods tools, including surveys, interviews, and group reflective practice boards. Where possible and appropriate, tools implemented in prior program evaluation activities are used or adapted to maximise the collection of consistent and comparative data. The design of evaluation tools is also guided by Quality Assurance review with the Human Research Ethics Committee at Royal Melbourne Hospital to ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards.



The eheadspace evaluation has a strong focus on outcomes measurement to demonstrate program effectiveness and impact. The DMHP Theory of Change features five high level outcome domains representing the broad areas of change that all headspace digital mental health programs are collectively working towards (Figure 3). The eheadspace evaluation prioritises measurement of these outcomes, and evaluation tools are selected and designed accordingly, with stories of change methodology embedded in evaluation tools where appropriate.

Access and awareness of mental health and wellbeing support

- Access to the right type of support that meets the needs of young people and families
- Choice in modes of access to support, ease, affordability, and timeliness of access to support
- Access to and awareness of mental health and wellbeing information and resources
- Increased mental health literacy, including knowledge and attitudes towards mental health

Positive help-seeking experience and capacity

- Positive experience and satisfaction with support
- Feelings of safety and trust engaging with support, being included, listened to and understood
- Increased confidence to communicate mental health issues and needs
- Increased capacity to seek support for mental health issues and needs in future

Capacity to self-monitor and manage mental health

- Opportunities to work on current mental health and wellbeing issues and situation
- Increased knowledge, skills, and strategies to manage current issues and situation
- Self-awareness and understanding of own emotions, thoughts and behaviour
- Capacity to cope with issues and challenges, and apply knowledge and skills to future situations

Improved mental health and wellbeing of young people

- Improved mental health and functioning in young people, reduced psychological distress
- Increased capacity to manage daily life and activities
- Improved relationships, sense of belonging and connection to the community and culture
- Increased feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, optimism and hope for the future

Strengthened and integrated youth mental health system

- Strengthened referral pathways and relationships between services, service providers and partners
- Improved integration of digital and in-person youth mental health services and supports
- Improved care collaboration between services, providers, and partners
- Increased capacity of the youth mental health workforce, including the peer workforce

Figure 3. DMHP outcome domains and eheadspace outcomes identified for measurement

Phase 3

Implement & analyse

The implementation phase includes data collection, analysis and synthesis. Evaluation tools to collect new data from primary sources are distributed, existing monitoring and evaluation data are extracted, and all data are collated and cleaned for analysis. Examples of evaluation methods and tools to collect primary data from service users, service providers, and other key stakeholders across headspace, service partner and community organisations are provided in Table 1.

Quantitative data are analysed using descriptive statistics to determine measures of central tendency (i.e., mean, median and mode) and spread (i.e., standard deviation and range), frequencies and proportions. Where relevant and appropriate, inferential statistics are used to explore associations between measures and any significant differences in outputs and outcomes between groups – for example, based on demographic and other service user characteristics.

Qualitative data are transcribed and thematically analysed. An inductive approach is taken initially, commencing with deep immersion in the data, followed by generating codes for key words and short phrases, and the development of emergent themes for review. Deductive validation of themes against program theory follows the inductive process, checking for alignment of themes with DMHP Theory of Change outcome domains and eheadspace outcomes, consolidation of themes where appropriate, and selection of representative quotes.

Data source	Evaluation methods and tools	Timing
Service users: young people and families	**Routine monitoring** through standard question sets about demographic and other characteristics, reasons for presenting, history of support, self-assessment of feelings, situation and level of psychological distress (DMHP MDS)	Registration and screening
	eheadspace feedback survey of the satisfaction with, experience and outcomes of a single session of 1:1 support	Opt-in at end of session
	eheadspace allocated care client survey of experience and outcomes from an episode of allocated care	Opt-in at end of episode of care
	eheadspace experience survey of reflections on experience and outcomes of accessing eheadspace support, including stories of change	Annual
Service providers: clinicians and peer workers	**Routine monitoring** through standard questions about the services they deliver, including service activity type, service user presentation, risk, and social and occupational functioning, service provided, referrals and recommendations (DMHP MDS)	End of session
	eheadspace allocated care clinician survey of client progress and outcomes from an episode of care	End of episode of care
	eheadspace service provider surveys of the experience of working for the program, observations of service user outcomes, and experience and outcomes from professional learning	Annual and end of learning event
	eheadspace digital staff storyboard of reflections on what is and isn't working, stories of change observed/experienced for young people, families, themselves or other staff or stakeholders	Ongoing
Partners and stakeholders	**Key stakeholder interviews** providing a range of perspectives on the program, including strengths, opportunities for improvement and innovation, and stories of change observed or experienced	Annual

Table 1. Examples of eheadspace evaluation methods and tools to collect data from primary sources

Phase 4

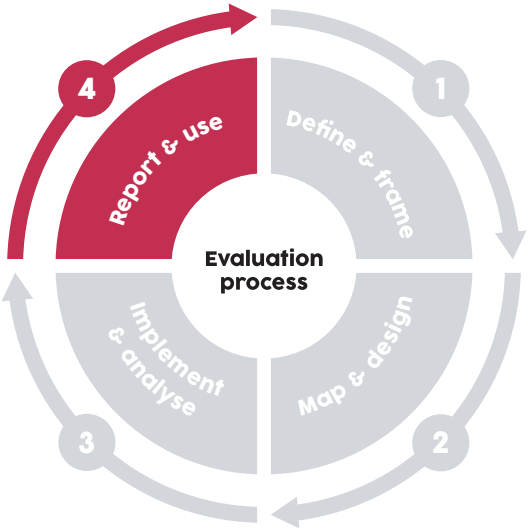
Report & use

Effective reporting and use of learnings is a critical phase of evaluation at headspace, and an essential step in the continuous cycle of building and using evidence in a way that contributes to the headspace vision of young people in Australia being mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

The eheadspace evaluation is committed to the effective dissemination of findings to contribute to and strengthen:

- practice and program improvement
- the evidence base in youth mental health
- accountability to funders.

Effective dissemination of learnings to inform improvement and innovation requires positive engagement with all stakeholders, and particularly with program staff and service providers. Program staff and service providers will be engaged in all aspects of the evaluation process, building their evaluation capacity, nurturing a positive measurement and evaluation culture, and enhancing uptake of monitoring and evaluation findings to improve practice and services.



Public availability and distribution of eheadspace evaluation products will support informed dialogue on good practice in digital and online youth mental health service design and delivery. eheadspace evaluation will be leveraged for research where appropriate, contributing to peer-reviewed publications and further strengthening the youth mental health evidence base in Australia and internationally.

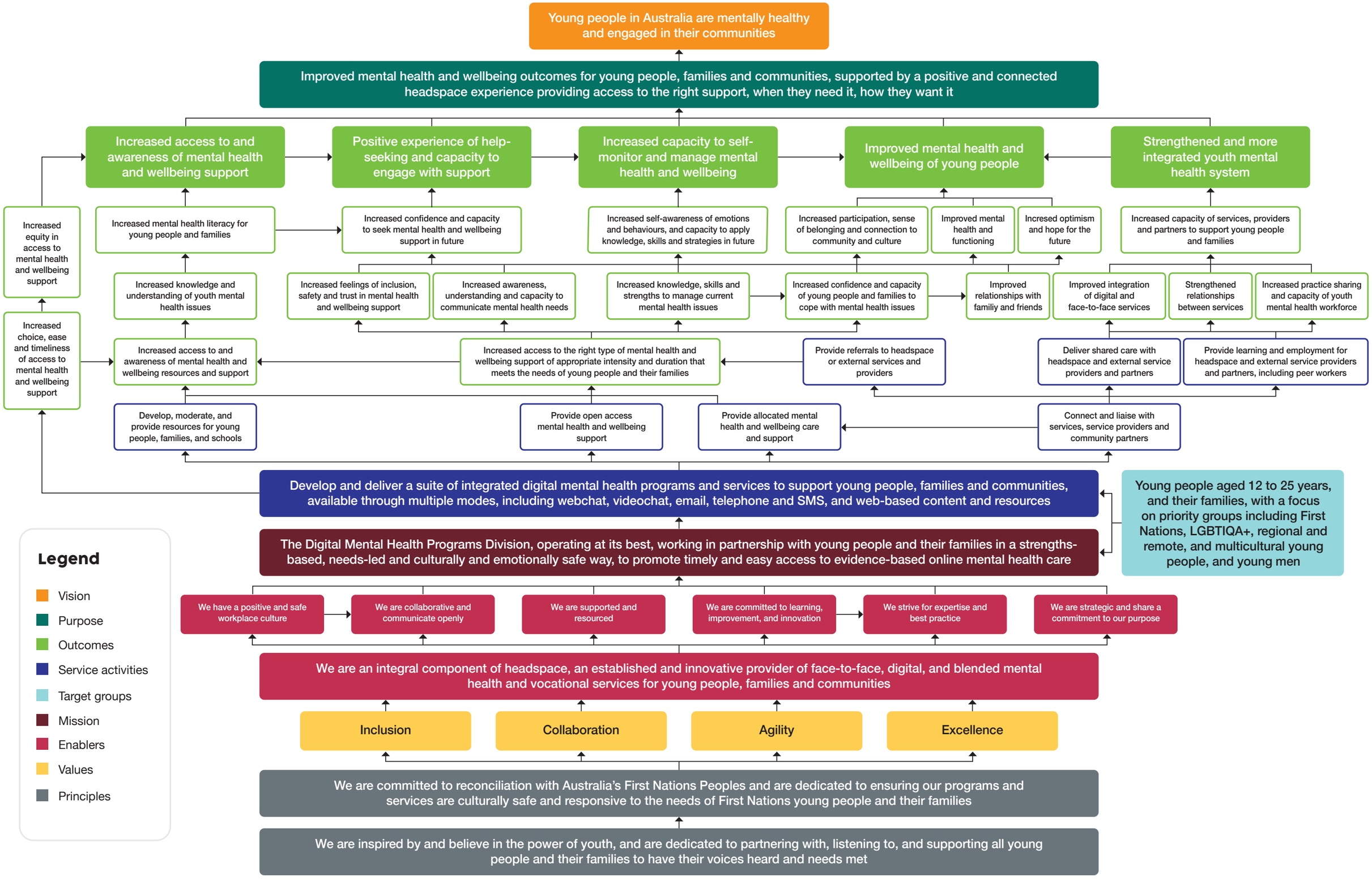
Finally, the dissemination of eheadspace evaluation findings and learnings will strengthen accountability and advocacy to current and future funders.

Examples of activities and products associated with eheadspace evaluation dissemination objectives are provided in Table 2.

Objective	Evaluation activities and products
Practice and program improvement	• Interactive presentations at regular team meetings • Activities and workshops embedded in regular planning days • Annual series of short evidence-based practice reports ('Evaluation Bites') • Annual 'evidence to action' workshop for staff
Evidence base in youth mental health	• Evaluation snapshot reports • Infographic summary reports • Formal evaluation reports • Peer-reviewed publications • Conference, forum and symposium presentations and workshops
Accountability to funders	• Biannual progress and performance reports • Interim evaluation reports • Final summary evaluation report

Table 2. Examples of eheadspace evaluation activities and products to disseminate and use findings

Digital Mental Health Programs Theory of Change



Appendix 1. Summary of the DMHP Theory of Change

eheadspace program logic

headspace Digital Mental Health Programs (DMHP)

Target group

- Young people (YP) aged 12 to 25 years and their families, within Australia, experiencing mental health (MH) issues, challenges or concerns
- Priority groups include YP who identify as First Nations, LGBTIQA+, living in regional and remote areas, multicultural, living with disability, young men, experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Stakeholders

- YP and families as above
- headspace DMHP staff
- headspace National
- headspace Centres
- Lead agencies (LAs)
- Primary Health Networks
- State funded mental health services
- Community organisations
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care

Program inputs

Human resources:

Service delivery
- eheadspace team: Services Manager, Clinical Coordinators, Senior Clinicians, Clinicians
- Online Communities Manager, Peer Work Leads, Senior Peer Workers, Peer Support Moderators

headspace National support
- DMHP leadership, program and operational staff
- Centre Services
- Clinical Practice (PTI)
- First Nations Wellbeing and Engagement (FNWE)
- Impact team (evaluation)
- Digital and Technology Services (DTS, including IT Support)
- People and Culture
- Strategic Communications and Marketing
- Finance and Legal

Funding:
- Commonwealth Government Department of Health and Aged Care

IT equipment and materials:
- Dynamic Health (DH) electronic medical record software and communication tools
- Rostering software
- Digital and printed marketing collateral

Activities and outputs

Provide open access mental health (MH) and wellbeing support by skilled and credentialed clinicians and peer workers, including:
- free, confidential and anonymous (service user choice) counselling services via live webchat, email, and phone
- ad hoc brief intervention sessions and follow-up care where indicated
- episodes of care including multiple sessions of counselling and therapy for YP and families
- support via online communities peer-led group chats and 1:1 peer support
- development of clinical care plans
- screening and management of incoming requests for support
- handover of clinical care across the team
- risk assessment and management

Connect and liaise with headspace and external services, providers and partners, to:
- provide referrals and linkages to further support and resources
- develop partnerships
- facilitate professional learning, clinical supervision and review for staff, clinicians and peer workers

Ensure smooth operation and administration of service, including:
- recruitment, onboarding and ongoing support of staff

Young people and families

Short term outcomes

Increased access to and awareness of mental health (MH) and wellbeing support, including:
- support of appropriate intensity and duration that meets the needs of YP and their families
- choice in modes of access to MH and wellbeing support
- increased ease, affordability, and timeliness of access to MH and wellbeing support
- access to and awareness of MH and wellbeing information, resources, and support

Positive experience of help-seeking and capacity to engage with MH support, including:
- satisfaction with MH and wellbeing support
- opportunity for meaningful connection and support

Opportunity to work on MH issues, challenges, and concerns of personal importance

Medium term outcomes

Positive experience of help-seeking and capacity to engage with mental health (MH) and wellbeing support, including:
- feeling included, listened to and understood
- feelings of safety, rapport with and trust in providers and services
- capacity to communicate needs

Increased capacity of YP to self-monitor and manage MH and wellbeing, including:
- increased awareness and understanding of MH issues and challenges
- increased knowledge, skills and strategies to manage MH issues and challenges
- increased self-awareness and understanding of own emotions, thoughts and behaviours
- increased capacity to cope with issues and challenges

Increased understanding of when to seek further or specialist support

Long term outcomes

Increased capacity to apply knowledge, skills, strategies and experiences to future mental health (MH) and wellbeing issues

Improved MH and wellbeing of YP, including:
- reduced symptoms of psychological distress
- increased capacity to manage daily life and activities
- improved self-confidence, self-esteem and worth
- improved relationships with family and friends
- increased sense of belonging and connection to community and culture
- improved MH and functioning
- increased optimism and hope for the future

Increased mental health literacy of YP and families, including improved attitudes towards MH

Increased capacity to seek support for MH needs in future

Youth MH system

Short term outcomes

- Strengthened referral pathways between services and partners
- Improved integration of digital and face-to-face youth MH services and supports
- Increased access to continuing professional learning, development, and experience
- Increased service provider knowledge and skills

Medium term outcomes

- Strengthened relationships between services, providers and partners
- Improved care collaboration between services, providers and partners
- Increased service provider knowledge and practice sharing
- Increased capacity of the youth MH workforce (including peer workers)

Long term outcomes

- Increased capacity of providers and services to support YP and families
- Increased equity in the youth MH system
- Strengthened evidence base and increased advocacy for the MH needs of young people
- Strengthened and more integrated youth MH system

Impact

Improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes for young people, families and communities, supported by a positive and connected headspace experience providing access to the right support, when they need it, how they want it

headspace Vision

Young people in Australia are mentally healthy and engaged in their communities

Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning

headspace DMHP and eheadspace evaluation frameworks and activities

Strategic and policy context

headspace strategic plans 2021 – 2024, 2025 - 2028
headspace DMHP Strategy 2024 – 2027
headspace Clinical Governance Framework DMHP
eheadspace Clinical Practice Manual
Online Communities Practice Manual
Online Communities Community Guidelines
National Safety & Quality Digital Mental Health Standards
National Digital Mental Health Framework

Enablers

We work in partnership with young people and their families in a strengths-based, needs-led and culturally and emotionally safe way, to promote timely and easy access to evidence-based digital and online mental health care

We are an integral component of headspace, an established, trusted and innovative provider of face-to-face, digital, and blended mental health and vocational services for young people, families, schools, and communities

We have a positive and inclusive workplace culture; we listen, accept ideas, work as a team

We are collaborative and communicative, building internal and external partnerships

We receive operational, administrative, and leadership support

We are committed to learning, improvement, and innovation, informed by QI and evaluation

We strive for best practice, designing inclusive, seamless and youth-friendly services

We are strategic and share a collective commitment to our purpose and values

headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.

headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

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