



# POSTGRADUATE WELLBEING GUIDE

A mental health and wellbeing guide by  
the UNSW Postgraduate Council



WELLNESS

# What is the PGC?



Find out more about us [here](#).

The Postgraduate Council (PGC) is an elected group of postgraduate students with the mission of advocating for, engaging and supporting UNSW postgraduate students.

*Run by students for students.*

## How to use this guide:

Being a postgraduate student comes with its own unique challenges, and there's nobody who understands that better than us! This guide is designed to support your wellbeing throughout your journey. It includes tips and resources to help you tackle the top 5 wellbeing issues experienced by postgraduate students, so whenever you encounter a challenge, you can turn to this guide to help navigate the ups and downs of postgraduate life.

Prioritise your wellbeing, and don't hesitate to reach out to UNSW and external services for more hands on support if needed —your success and happiness are worth it!

# CONTENTS

|                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| Wellbeing                                      | 4  |
| 1. Maintaining a Work-Life Balance             | 5  |
| 2. Dealing with Imposter Syndrome              | 8  |
| 3. Finding Support When Feeling Isolated       | 12 |
| 4. Managing Stress                             | 14 |
| 5. Handling Financial Difficulties             | 17 |
| Resources to Support Your Postgraduate Journey | 21 |
| Acknowledgements                               | 28 |



# Wellbeing

‘Wellbeing’ describes a comprehensive and stable view of your current mental, emotional and physical states and is comprised of multiple factors that each contribute to your overall health and functioning. While one’s wellbeing can be influenced by internal and personal actions, it can also be influenced by external social, economic and environmental conditions.

## So, what is wellbeing composed of?

### Psychological (mental) wellbeing:

Consists of things such as your self-worth, your levels of self-confidence and autonomy, and your perceived level of mastery over your environment.



### Subjective (emotional) wellbeing:

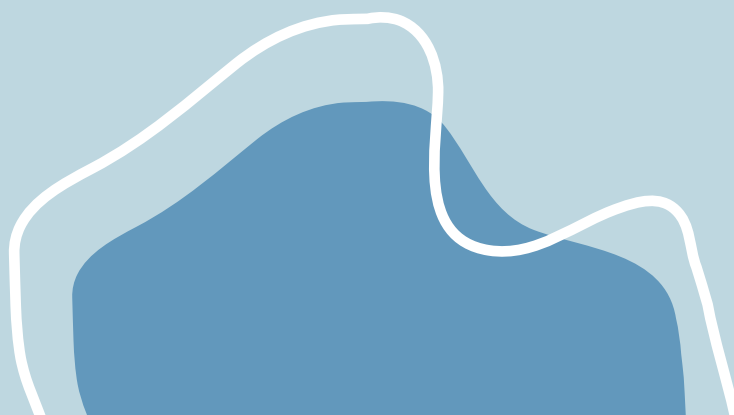
Consists of your positive and negative emotions (including happiness), as well as how satisfied you are with your life.



### Physical wellbeing:

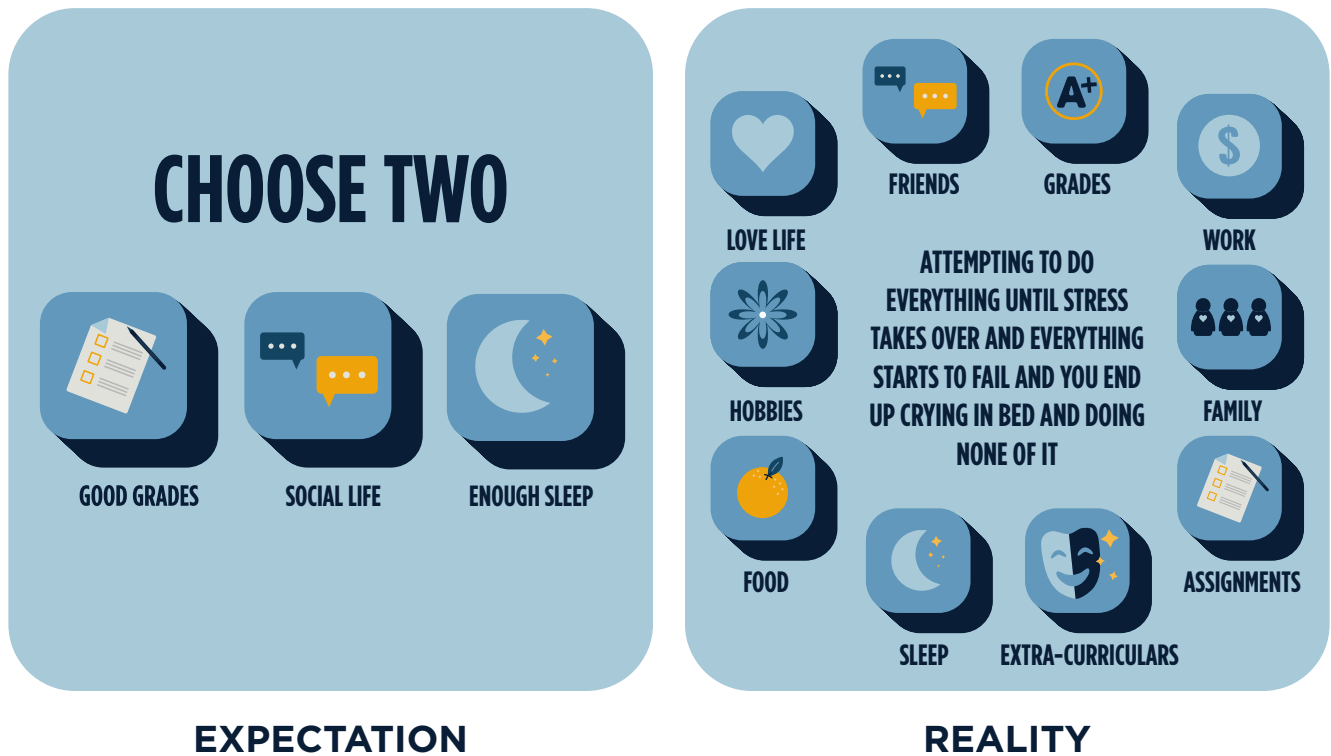
How you feel in your physical body and being able to carry out daily activities without undue fatigue or stress.

As you manoeuvre your way through this journey, and come across both highs and lows, take a step back and ask yourself how you feel in terms of psychological, subjective and physical wellbeing. Think of ways that will not only make you happier and more accomplished, but more rested and restored. Just being aware that there are multiple facets to being well, and figuring out different strategies that work for you, will help you live the best life you can – or get through this year the best you can!



# 1. Maintaining a Work-Life Balance

As a student (and especially a postgrad student) it can be difficult to juggle all your professional and educational responsibilities while taking care of your mental, physical, social, and spiritual health.



While the most convenient answer would be to prioritise and focus on the most important or urgent aspects of life at once, we understand that it may not always be possible. There may be times in life when you need to work to be able to feed yourself, and work on assignments that are due in a week, and plan a friend's birthday party, and train for that half marathon you signed up for and do a million other things you told yourself you would. But trying to accomplish everything at once is only going to leave you feeling burnt out and exhausted.

# So how can you do what you need to and take care of yourself?

**1. Be prepared** for your idea of a work-life balance to fluctuate weekly, or even day to day. Based on the time in the trimester/year you may not have a perfect 50/50 split – some days you may need to study or work more and others you may need to spend more time resting or with family and friends, and that's ok!

**2. Scheduling** – plan ahead for the things you absolutely need to survive (including SLEEP) and block out the rest of your time so you can carve out time for yourself.

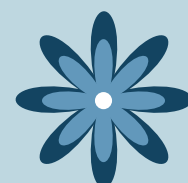
**3. Communicate** – your supervisors and tutors have all been in a similar position to you and will more likely than not understand where you're coming from if you are feeling overwhelmed or burnt out.

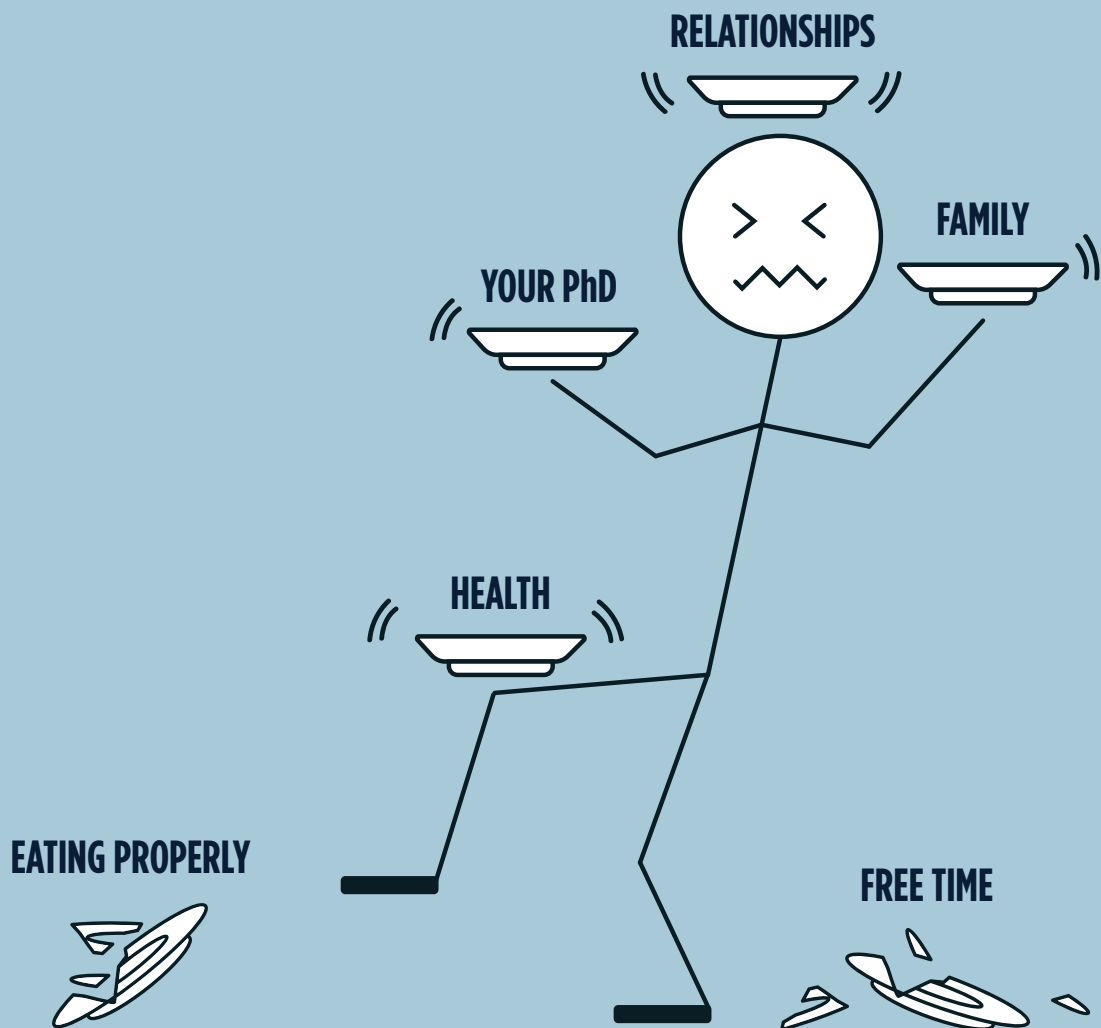
**4. Merge aspects of work and life where you can** – plan to study and body double with a friend so you can be productive and still take breaks to socialise, or have a walking meeting so you can take care of your physical health while working

**5. Prioritise things that will make you feel better and more motivated to tackle the harder tasks** – whether that's playing a sport, cooking, playing video games, hanging out with a friend or family member, bingeing your favourite comfort shows in bed, or even napping!

**6. Jazz up the boring tasks you have to do** – for those unavoidable tasks try doing them in a more pleasant location or add your favourite music to make it a bit more fun

If you want to read other postgrad student's experiences and tips, click [here](#) and [here](#)!





## Trying to do everything as a postgraduate student can be a bit tricky!

And remember, you don't have to balance all the plates at once, you can always ask for help and choose to put some plates down instead of waiting for them to fall!

*What you're doing is good enough!*

## 2. Dealing With Imposter Syndrome

You probably have had it at any stage in your life. Let's see if you relate to any of the following statements:

- You achieve great results on a project or test, but you think "I must have gotten lucky."
- When someone praises your work, you tend to downplay your contribution or deflect the praise.
- With a new challenge you feel intense anxiety and think that you won't be able to handle it.
- You compare yourself to others and often feel like you don't measure up to their achievements.
- You make a mistake and think that it proves that you are not good enough.

**82%**

Of people experience imposter feelings (based on a synthesis of studies)

Bravata, et al., 2020

**75%**

Of executive women say they've experience imposter syndrome.

KPMG, 2020

**84%**

Of entrepreneurs and small business owners report experiencing imposter syndrome

Kajabi, 2020

**80%**

Of CEOs feel out of their depth in their roles.

Dropbox & School of Life Study, 2017





## So what is it?

Imposter syndrome is a persistent feeling of self-doubt and the fear of being “exposed” as a fraud. It affects high achievers (hello, us!) who struggle to internalize their accomplishments and believe they are not as competent as others perceive them to be. They often attribute their success to luck or external factors, downplaying their real skills. This can lead to anxiety, depression, and difficulty enjoying achievements. Many of us have felt it.



### Scan to Watch:

A video by Brian Keating about Einstein having Imposter Syndrome!

## Here are some helpful strategies:

If, even after trying these strategies, feelings of imposter syndrome are still significantly impacting your daily life, please consider seeking professional help from a therapist or counsellor. Remember, you are not alone in this, and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

### CHALLENGE YOUR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS!

When that inner critic whispers “you’re a fraud”, challenge it with evidence. List your accomplishments, skills, and positive feedback you’ve received.

### FOCUS ON PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Celebrate incremental progress and focus on learning from setbacks rather than dwelling on them.



### CELEBRATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Don’t downplay your successes. Acknowledge your hard work and genuinely enjoy reaching milestones.

### PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Prioritize sleep, healthy eating, and exercise. Taking care of yourself helps manage stress and promotes mental well-being. This guide provides great advice!



### Scan to Read:

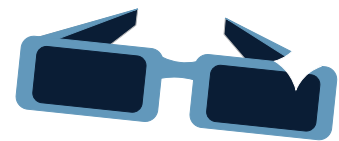
"You're Not an Imposter. You're Actually Pretty Amazing" by Kress Eruteya

## SEEK AVAILABLE SUPPORT

Talk to your supervisor, a counsellor, or a trusted friend about your feelings. Talking openly can normalize the experience and offer valuable support.

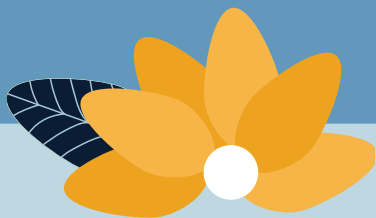
## "REFRAME" COMPARISONS

Instead of comparing yourself to others, use their success as motivation and ask them for help!



## RECOGNISE YOUR WORTH

You deserve to be in your program. Remind yourself of the skills and experiences that got you admitted. You belong at UNSW!



# 3. Finding Support When Feeling Isolated

Living in the world of social media, work from home and online classes, finding that feeling of genuine connection with others may require that extra bit of effort, and that isolation can be further amplified as a postgrad student. Especially if you're in the research space working on your own independent projects without classes or regular gatherings with peers. But know that you are not the only one experiencing this!

Chances are others are also looking for that feeling of connection and community so reach out!

## 1. Talk to Someone You Feel Comfortable With



Reach out to someone in your life that you can be honest with. Talking to someone you already feel close with can make you feel supported even if they can't directly help you with what you're tackling.

## 2. UNSW Student Societies

UNSW has so many societies ranging from religious and cultural groups to communities to share your favourite hobbies with. The Postgraduate Council is the perfect place if you want to find people going through a similar educational experience as you.

Check out all the UNSW societies [here](#)!

And find other postgrads [here](#) and [here](#)!



### 3. Reach Out to a Peer or Mentor

Whether it's a classmate, someone from your lab/office, tutor or supervisor, chat to someone who understands your experience as a postgrad student and can provide compassionate support.

### 4. Use Social Media

Maybe there's someone you added on social media from that class last year, but you haven't really connected with them. Maybe you just want to talk to someone you haven't seen in a while. There's no harm in sending that message!

### 5. Join Clubs That You Find Interesting

If you're looking for a community to share your passions with or even try something new outside of uni, there are apps such as "MeetUp" or "TalkCampus" that allow you to do just that!

Click for [MeetUp](#)

Click for [TalkCampus](#)

### 6. More Professional Support

Resources to more professional support can be found at the bottom of this document:

**UNSW Psychology & Wellness Support Services**

# 4. Managing Stress

Who would've thought, being a postgrad student can be very stressful! First of all, you are not alone! Give yourself some compassion and remember that there is so much more to you than your grades and education. Here are some techniques to help you slow down and release some of that stress.

## Nervous System Regulation – Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques can provide immediate relief by regulating your nervous system:

1

**Physiological sigh** - take a deep inhale followed by a short second inhalation, and then an extended exhalation.

2

**Box breathing** – inhale, hold your breath and exhale for the same amount of time each. For example, inhale for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 4 seconds and exhale for 4 seconds.

3

**Diaphragmatic breathing** – breathe in deeply into your belly and exhale with your diaphragm.

## Mindfulness



On top of regulating your nervous system through breathwork, meditation and mindful practices can help you distance yourself from your thoughts by being aware of the present moment. These practices reduce stress, improve wellbeing, and can be enjoyable in their own right.





**Mindfulness means paying attention non-judgmentally to your conscious experience in the present moment.**

There are many apps or videos online that provide guided meditations and breathing exercises (click on these to find out more):

**Arc Wellness guide  
to mindfulness  
(with videos)**

**Guided Meditation  
on Stress**

**Balance App  
(Free)**

**Headspace App  
(Partially Free)**

**Smiling Mind App  
(Partially Free)**

**Calm App  
(Partially Free)**

You can also try and practice mindfulness by being present during everyday activities such as:



**Going for a walk** – focus on the feeling of your feet hitting the ground with each step, or the sounds and sights around you. Noticing the feelings and sensations in your body can help you get out of your head and feel more grounded.

**Mindful stretching** - notice how your body feels while doing different stretches or yoga poses. Slow deliberate movements can also get you out of your head if you're feeling overwhelmed.

**Writing in a journal** – be present with yourself and check-in with your emotions by noting down whatever is on your mind or in your heart.

**Doing chores mindfully** – try washing the dishes or folding laundry while paying attention to the act itself and different sensations.



## Talk to Someone



If the above techniques aren't working for you, try talking to a trusted friend who you feel comfortable with. Even if they can't provide any direct solutions, just talking to someone you feel safe with can release some of the pressure to deal with the stress on your own. Here's the science behind it: socializing fosters the release of endorphins, which combat stress hormones like cortisol.

Talk to your supervisor or course convenor if your stress is related to a high workload that is just unmanageable. They have probably felt stressed at some point as well and would most likely empathise with you and want to help!





# 5. Handling Financial Difficulties



- Struggling to **juggle** tuition fees, living expenses, and research costs on a limited budget?
- Feeling **stuck** between focusing on your studies and finding enough time for a well-paying job?
- Worried about the weight of student loans from undergrad adding to your current financial **burden**?

Whether you knew it upfront or it's a bit of a shock, Sydney's famous lifestyle can come with a hefty price tag, and **lots of people are struggling with the same concerns.**

We know it can feel overwhelming trying to figure out your finances, so we've got your back. **Take things one small step at a time and don't try to do it all at once.** The energy you invest in these steps will build your financial wellbeing skills for the rest of your life, so it's worth doing sustainably.

The key takeaways are:



- **Awareness is power:** Track your spending, create a budget, and prioritize needs over wants.
- **Explore financial resources:** Utilize scholarships, grants, and student loans responsibly.
- **Seek support services:** Don't hesitate to reach out to your university's financial aid office or financial counseling services.

Financial difficulties are common, but not insurmountable. By **taking control of your finances now**, you'll be setting yourself up for a **brighter financial future**, allowing you to focus on your academic goals with **peace of mind**. Financial literacy is a lifelong journey – keep learning, talking about the topic with peers to **learn from each other**, and adapting your strategies as your needs evolve.

Try the steps below and see how you get on, taking time to reflect after each one.

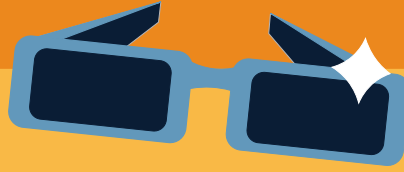
## 1. Tracking Expenses

Organize your incomes and expenses. Divide them by category: rent, university, utilities, food, transportation, etc. This will take time, we know. However, it will be worth it. Think of it as an investment that will alleviate your costs in the short and long run.

## 2. Budgeting

Once you have your expenses and incomes organized (you can use excel or a tracking app) create a realistic budget for each category. You won't be able to follow it to the letter each month, but it will help you to visualize where your money is going.





### 3. Look for Resources!

Did you know there are resources available to help you save money on essentials? **Food Hub** is one of them. It is an ARC initiative that is free for students. You need to register online, and that's it! How about the **Stationary Reuse Centre**? It offers free stationery products for UNSW students! Low on clothes? Have you heard about "**Op-shops**"? Op-shops are second-hand clothing and accessories stores run by charity organizations. Good quality items for a 1/3 of the cost.

Scan the QR codes on the next page for more information.

### 4. Different Income Opportunities

As of 1 July 2024, the National Minimum Wage is \$24.10 per hour or \$915.90 per week. Have you considered job positions that might not be related to your degree? They might seem unrelated now, but everything can and will teach you valuable lessons and skills that you will use in the future.



### 5. Financial Aid Scholarships



Help is available, from the government for domestic students and from the University for international and domestic students. Don't be afraid to ask, we can relate more than you know. See available options and maybe, book an appointment with an advisor if you need. It is free.

<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/finance/management>



## **NSW Cost of Living Hub**

Smart ways to save and manage your budget, along with expert advice you can trust, all backed by the NSW Government.



## **Financial Wellness - Arc x Money Mag**

Educational articles with money saving tips from the experts over at Money Mag, specifically designed for UNSW students.



## **Money Matters - An Arc Initiative**

This comprehensive guide delves into the best online money-making strategies. Learn how to master your finances and unlock the secrets to achieving all your financial goals, from daily indulgences to long-term investments.



## **UNSW Financial Management & Support**

Get help from a UNSW Student Support Advisor! Plus, plus information about grants, loans, commonwealth assistance, Centrelink and Scholarships.



## **Food Hub**

A free food pantry initiative by UNSW. Registration is necessary.

# Resources to Support Your Postgraduate Journey

## UNSW HDR Health & Wellbeing Ambassadors (HWAs)

A committed, active and vibrant network of HDRs in each faculty that play a key role in promoting your peer's health and wellbeing.



## Stress Less Week



Organised by Arc to allow students a moment off their studies to take care of their mental health, Stress Less Week occurs in Week 8 of every term.

During this period, the Quadrangle becomes a lively place to play sports, pat a puppy, eat brekkie and kick back and relax!

## Arc Sport

Arc offers opportunities to take your mind off studies/work and get some exercise. Get involved individually or as a team in social sports.

## UNSW Fitness & Aquatic Centre

Get active by going to the gym, swimming some laps or joining a group fitness class.

# Mental & Physical Health Support Services

## UNSW Psychology & Wellness Support Services

- **Confidential 24/7** telephone helplines, emergency contacts and online chat forums for urgent help.
- **Mental Health Connect** – a series of support services that UNSW can connect you to on and off campus.
- Free telehealth and face-to-face **counselling** for students.

.....

**Level 2, East Wing, Quadrangle Building (off the Basser steps)**

**Phone** (02) 9385 5418

**Website** <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/counselling>

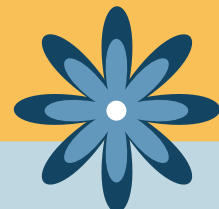
**Email** [counselling@unsw.edu.au](mailto:counselling@unsw.edu.au)



## UNSW Health Services

Sick or unwell? At UNSW, there are general practitioners (GPs) and specialist doctors who are available for consultation. Students, staff and visitors are all able to book in an appointment to help you with any concerns you may have about your health and wellbeing.

**Website** <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/hsu>



## Academic Support



### Equitable Learning Services

Are you neurodivergent? Are you living with a physical or mental health condition that impacts your studies? Or are you a carer for someone with these conditions? Contact UNSW equitable learning services if you require assistance.

**Website** <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/equitable-learning>

## Legal Advice & Services

- **Kingsford Legal Centre**
- **Arc Legal & Advocacy Student Organisation**
- **Indigenous Law Centre**
- <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/legal>

## Complaints Portal



If you have experienced or witnessed any harassment, discrimination or misconduct of any sort at UNSW you can report a complaint through the conduct and integrity office.

**This can be reported anonymously and safely at:**

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/planning-assurance/conduct-integrity/complaints-unsw>

## Outside UNSW



### Sports at Centennial Parklands

Whether it's netball, tennis, soccer or basketball, Centennial Parklands at Moore Park has a range of sporting activities that can help you stay active. Registrations allow both individual and group applications, so you can gather friends and register as a team or register solo to make new friends!

## Resources for UNSW Canberra Students

### ● Learning and Academic Support

UNSW Canberra's Learning and Teaching Group (LTG) offer support services, including individual consultations with advisors, workshops, and online resources, to help students succeed in their studies.

**Webpage** [Click Here](#)

**Phone** +61 (2) 5114 5654

**Email** [KnowALL@adfa.edu.au](mailto:KnowALL@adfa.edu.au)



### ● Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Staff and students can seek confidential advice and support, and discuss options for resolution of concerns about Equity matters, including:

- Advice and referral on equity, diversity, inclusion, flexible work and wellbeing.
- Advice and assistance with obtaining workplace adjustments or additional educational support for staff and students with disability, mental health and other medical conditions.

**General UNSW Website** <https://www.edi.unsw.edu.au/students>

**UNSW Canberra EDI SharePoint (only available for enrolled students)**  
<https://unsw.sharepoint.com/sites/unswcanberraedi>



## Wellbeing and Mental Health Support (UNSW Canberra)

At the UNSW Canberra Psychology and Wellness Service, students can either see a Clinical Psychologist or work with a Wellbeing Advisor, both available Monday-Friday.

**You can access more information at:**

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/canberra/student-life/student-support-services/counselling>

## Mental Health Support in ACT

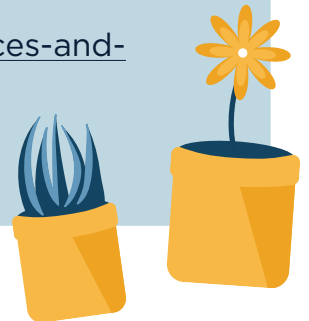
The ACT Government also provides information and support. The Access Mental Health Team is available 24 hours, 7 days per week, for people who have concerns about their own or someone else's mental health.

They provide information, make recommendations, and/or refer you for further mental health support.

.....

**Website** <https://www.canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au/services-and-clinics/services/access-mental-health>

**Phone** 1800 629 354



## Medical Assistance

For students with Medibank, there are two direct billing clinics in Canberra:

### HealthFount Medical Centre



[Website](#)



4/5 Macquarie Pl,  
Macquarie ACT 2614



(02) 5112 2245

### Warramaga Medical Centre



[Website](#)

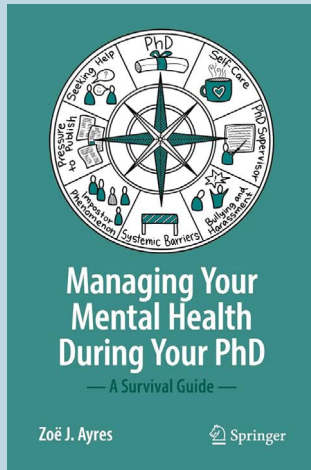


29 Waramanga Pl,  
Waramanga ACT 2611



(02) 6288 1855

## Other Resources



**Managing your Mental Health during your PhD: A Survival Guide** is written by Dr Zoe J. Ayres, a former PhD student. This book discusses why mental health issues are so common among the postgraduate population and offers self-care strategies to help PhD candidates throughout their journey.

This e-book is available via the UNSW library website.

### PhD Student YouTube Channels and Blogs

- **Dr Andy Stapleton (PhD graduate from University of Newcastle)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/@DrAndyStapleton>
- **Miss Sariy (UNSW PhD student who creates content in Indonesian and English)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/@misssariy>
- **PhD and Productivity (PhD student in Dublin Ireland)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/@PhDandProductivity>
- **The Thesis Whisperer**  
<https://thesiswhisperer.com/>



### Applications (More on the Next Page!)

#### Balance

Available for  
iOS, Android  
and Web

**Balance** is a free app that uses AI to offer a huge range of personalised meditation practices to help with stress, sleep, focus, mood, and more.

## Smiling Mind

Available for  
iOS, Android  
and Web

As its name suggests, this app puts a **“smile on your mind.”**

This is a free mindfulness app that harbours hundreds of meditations which are organised into structured programs such as a) mindful foundations, sleep, digital detox and stress management.



## Calm

Available for  
iOS, Android  
and Web

**Calm** features hundreds of calming exercises, breathing techniques and incorporates real-life visuals and nature sounds to help you wind down when feeling stressed or anxious.

## Insight Timer

Available for  
iOS, Android  
and Web

**Insight Timer** offers guided meditations covering a range of topics including stress, relationships, healing, sleep and creativity. Engaging with it fosters a sense of belonging to a global community.



## Beyondblue Check-in App

**The Beyondblue Check-in App** takes the fear out of having conversation with a friend who might be struggling with a mental health issue.

By following four simple steps, you can easily lay out a plan on how to approach a person you care about, what you will say and how you will offer support.

## Headspace

Available for  
iOS, Android  
and Web

**Headspace** provides easy guided meditation sessions, mindfulness practices and tools for stress reduction and better sleep.



# Acknowledgements

The creation of this Postgraduate Student Wellbeing Guide by the UNSW Postgraduate Council Equity team for the years 2023 and 2024 has been a collaborative effort, and we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to its development.

- **PGC Equity Vice President (2023-2024):** Gurpreet Hansra
- **PGC Equity Committee Liaison 2023:** Ratih Aruum Listiyandini
- **PGC Equity Committee Liaison 2024:** Nitharsaa Ambalavanar
- **PGC committee members 2023:** Nitharsaa Ambalavanar, Nisha Mathew, Chiettha Prajnadewie
- **PGC committee members 2024:** Claudia Pantoja Mardones, Chiettha Prajnadewie
- Dr. Haeme Park, and Dr. Luke Egan for their contributions
- UNSW Health Promotions Unit, particularly Cameron Faricy
- Atia Fatimah, who kindly helped provide feedback
- UNSW MED HDR Health and Wellbeing Ambassadors (HWAs)
- **PGC Canberra office Vice President (2023-2024):** Daiana Seabra Venancio
- All the postgrad students that helped provide feedback throughout the development of this guide (particularly the Canberra students that attended the first unveiling in 2023)

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support and encouragement from Tony Le, the President of PGC in 2024, and Sidra Sarwat, the General Secretary of PGC in 2023-2024.

We hope this guide serves as a valuable resource for all postgraduate students, providing the support and information needed to thrive during your academic journey. Your wellbeing matters!



UNSW Student Life