MENTAL HEALTH IN CRICKET

Guidance for Members

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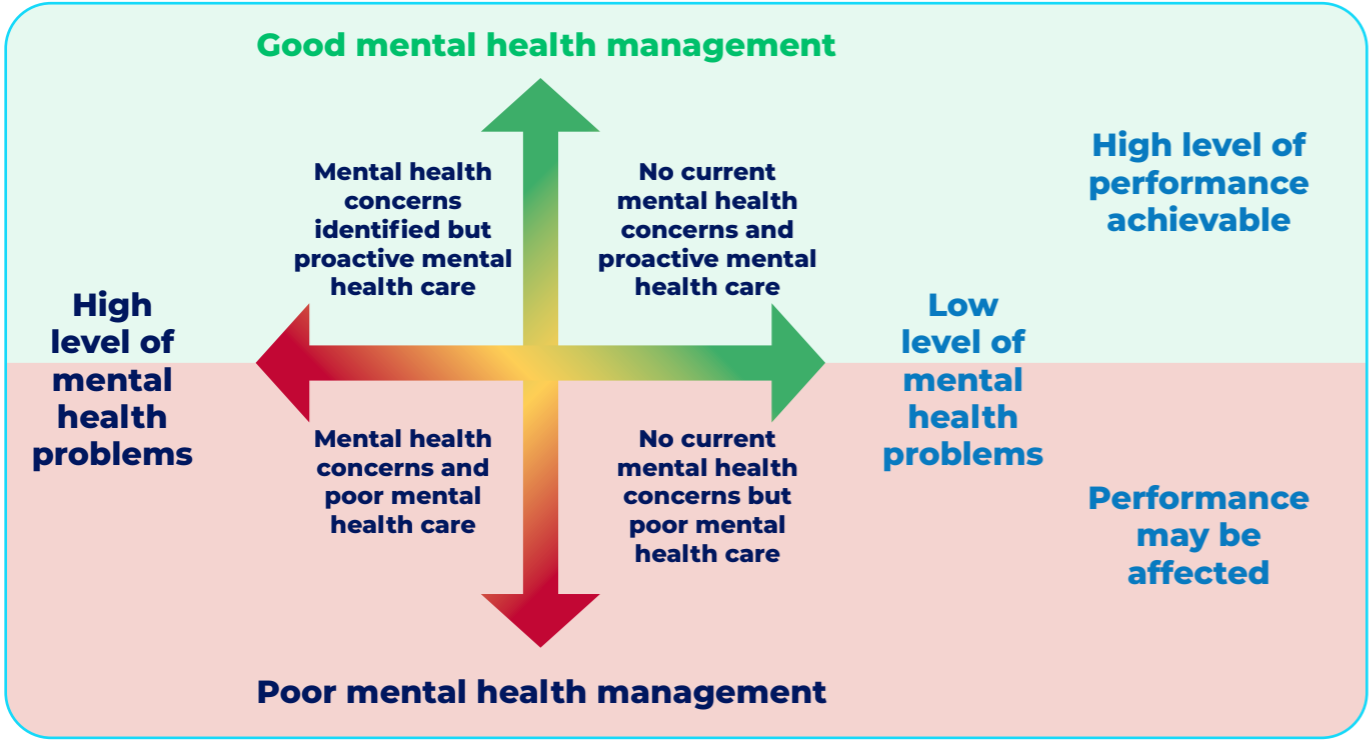
Introduction

Mental health is an important pillar of player/team welfare and sporting success. As the pressures in our sport continue to grow, such as crowded cricketing calendars, social media exposure, extended travel and time away from family and public scrutiny, the risk of mental health challenges within a team also rises.

A 2019 Olympic Committee consensus statement revealed that 35% of elite athletes experience symptoms of mental health disorders, including stress, anxiety, and depression, which can significantly impair performance[1]. These figures highlight the urgent need for proactive, structured support systems within sporting organisations.

In cricket, Member Boards play a central role in creating environments that support both the physical and psychological well-being of players, coaches, and support personnel to enable them to perform at their best. The diagram below shows the importance of good mental health management in relation to performance. This is applicable for everyone, regardless of whether they are experiencing mental health problems or not.

Good mental health management

High level of performance achievable

Mental health concerns identified but proactive mental health care

No current mental health concerns and proactive mental health care

High level of mental health problems

Low level of mental health problems

Mental health concerns and poor mental health care

No current mental health concerns but poor mental health care

Performance may be affected

Poor mental health management

This document aims to provide Members with guidance in creating and improving mental health programs that promote well-being by enabling positive mental health and supporting those experiencing mental health problems.

This is achieved by considering the following key areas:

- Psychologically safe environments
- Support and signposting
- Who leads on mental health

Together, these elements form the foundation of a healthy sporting culture—one where mental well-being is recognised, protected, and supported at every level.

It is beneficial for every Member to have a mental health program that builds resilience, enables early intervention, provides targeted support and promotes a positive environment where individuals are valued beyond their performance.

Important Definitions

Well-being

A positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish'. This means that at the level of an individual, well-being refers to psychological, physical and social states that are distinctively positive.[2]

Mental health

Mental health is a dynamic state of well-being in which people can realize their potential, see a purpose and meaning in sport and life, experience trusting personal relationships, cope with common life stressors and the specific stressors in elite sport and are able to act autonomously according to their values.[3]

Mental health problem

A pattern of behaviour, experiences, thoughts and feelings that causes significant distress and/or impairment of daily functioning and/or difficulties in relationships with others. Such distress or impairments are most likely to be experienced over a period and are not easily alleviated by an individual's typical coping strategies.[4]

Psychologically Safe Environments

Psychological safety in sport has been defined as environments where individuals are comfortable being themselves, can take necessary interpersonal risks, have the knowledge and understanding of mental health symptoms and problems, and feel supported and comfortable in seeking help if needed.[5]

The benefits of a psychologically safe environment include reduced stigma around mental health, stronger team relationships built on trust, greater opportunity for early intervention and strengthened overall resilience.

To create a psychologically safe environment it is important to consider:

Education

- Provide education that helps raise awareness, reduce stigma and recognise early signs of mental health problems.
- Share coping strategies and encourage help-seeking behaviour.
- When planning an education session make sure to include:
  » What mental health is, why it matters in cricket and how it differs from a mental health problem.
  » The signs of potential poor mental health
  » The importance of self-care and wellbeing
  » How and when to ask for help and where to go for support
  » Supporting others in a team sport environment
  » Confidentiality
  » Acknowledge the role of key related areas, such as social media (e.g. provide guidance on good social media practices)
- Consider who should receive education and how frequently.

Support Available

- Create clear and accessible support structures (see section on support and signposting for further information on what this could look like) to enable help seeking and communicate these effectively.
- Identify vulnerable individuals such as younger players, those dealing with injuries, players close to retirement, individuals with a history of mental illness and have a plan of how best to support them.

Screening

- Regular mental health screening of players alongside physical screening is recommended. However, given the range in size and scale of ICC Members, this may be more of a challenge to some than others.
- The IOC's Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool (SMHAT-1) has been developed for use by any clinician to identify elite athletes at risk for mental health symptoms and disorders. The tool also helps to identify appropriate next steps, from simple monitoring and support through to specialist referral. The tool is available online in multiple languages **here**.
- Members are encouraged to consider using this tool in the screening, however there is no requirement to use it, especially if Members already use an alternative that they are happy with.

- The main benefits of the SMHAT-1 are that it:
  » was developed with and for elite athletes
  » includes a breadth of symptoms and
  » identifies next steps

NOTE: If you are going to screen, be prepared to intervene - It is important that systems are in place for appropriate follow-up where any potential mental health concern is flagged by the screening. If these are not in place, then it is better not to carry out screening.

Championing Mental Health

- Members can either create a group or appoint a mental health champion with responsibility for seeking feedback and regularly reviewing the team environment. See the section below on 'Who Leads on Mental Health' for more on what this role should involve.

Risk Assessments

- Members should also consider conducting a risk assessment to identify factors that may affect team member's mental wellbeing. This will enable members to consider how they can best support their teams and put measures in place to mitigate these factors if possible.
- These factors may include (this is not an exhaustive list):
  » Extended travel periods and time away from families
  » Crowded cricketing calendars
  » Competing in difficult conditions
  » Poor accommodation and limited access to food that meets cultural preferences
- Some measures to mitigate these factors could include:
  » Providing as much notice as possible about travel plans and support development of communication plans whilst away.
  » Enabling staff and players to identify opportunities to have protected downtime where possible.
  » Ensuring teams are well-prepared to train and compete in challenging playing/environmental conditions, and that support staff are fully equipped to provide appropriate guidance, resources, and care.
  » Ensuring staff and players are as informed as possible about limitations of accommodation and food available and support them to plan accordingly.

Please see the appendix for an example risk assessment template.

Support and Signposting

The safe environments described in the previous section should help encourage individuals to engage in help-seeking behaviour.

It is therefore important for all sources of support available to players and support staff to be clearly communicated and easily accessible so that any individual would know where to seek support for themselves or direct a teammate or colleague.

Sources of support may include:

- Professional support for performance related problems (e.g. a sport psychologist) and mental health problems (e.g. psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, counsellors or therapists available through in-person or online support).

- Organisational support through a mental health champion, team medical staff, Chief Medical Officer or others. For more details, please refer to the section titled – 'Who Leads on Mental Health'.

- Online support – this could include platforms or apps that offer mindfulness tools and virtual counselling.

- General mental health support provided by Government or by NGOs.

- Self-help mechanisms such as meditation, journaling, mood tracking, educational videos and podcasts.

- Speaking to a trusted friend or family member who provides emotional support, perspective, and encouragement during challenging times.

A good mental health program will offer a mix of these support sources, recognizing that one size does not fit all.

Communicating the support available

Identifying the sources of support available is an important first step but it is just as important to communicate the available support services. Signposting mental health support means clearly directing individuals to the support services, and resources available. This could include:

- Reminders during routine team briefings

- Posters in dressing rooms

- Reminders in team group messages

- Developing a mental health handbook – refer to the ICC Mental Health Awareness in Cricket document.

- Individuals should also be encouraged to engage with Mental Health Awareness training to support timely help-seeking for themselves and on behalf of others.
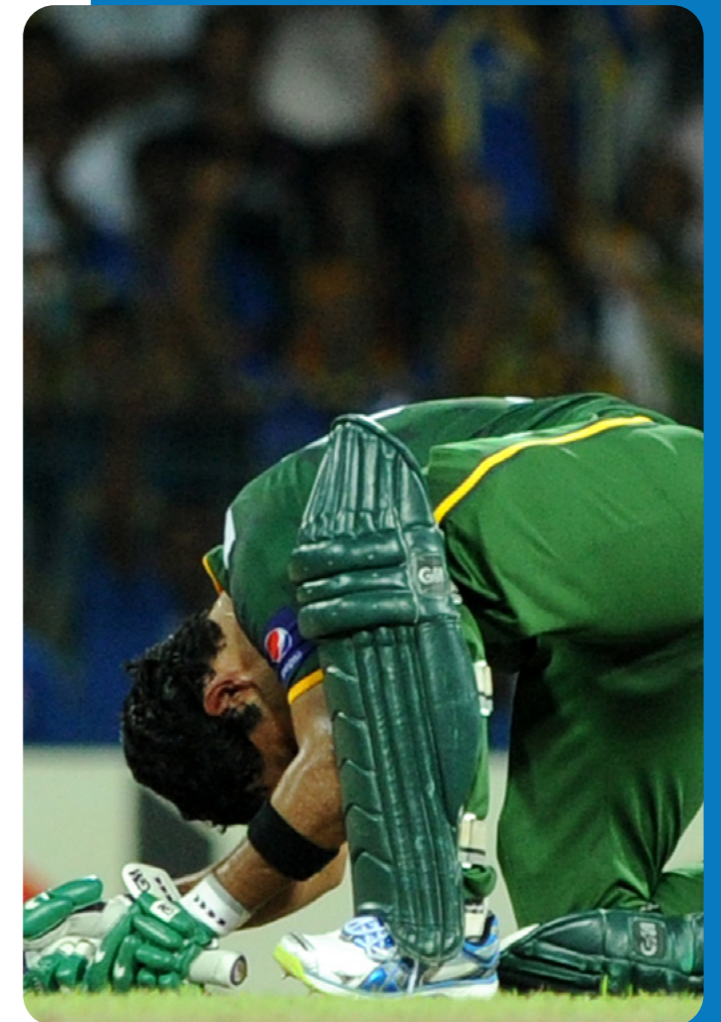
A note on confidentiality

- An important part of any mental health support service is confidentiality, and this is even more important in sport where there may be a fear of being judged or having an impact on selection.

- Appropriate use of confidentiality builds trust and encourages honest conversations allowing individuals to feel safe to ask for help.

- Be prepared to explain how information shared with the support services will be used and stored confidentially.

- While confidentiality should be prioritised, there could be circumstances when it may be necessary to break confidentiality, such as when there are concerns about breaches of criminal law or a situation where an individual may be at risk of either harming themselves or others.

Protocols

Having protocols in place in a mental health program is essential to ensure a consistent, safe, and effective approach to managing mental health concerns. They provide clear guidance on roles and responsibilities and ensure legal and ethical compliance. Protocols also build trust in the program, promote help-seeking behaviour, and enable appropriate crisis management. Below are some important protocols to consider when developing a mental health program.

- **Referral Protocols** - Clearly detail how to respond when someone seeks support or shows signs of mental health concern and how to connect them to professional help.

- **Confidentiality protocols** - Outline how sensitive information is stored and shared and when confidentiality can be broken (such as risk of serious harm to oneself or others etc.).

- **Crisis Management Protocol** - Clear guidance on how to respond to a mental health emergency, including contacts of emergency services, who should be notified, creating an immediate safety plan and a clear outline of responsibilities.

Having protocols in place in a mental health program is essential to ensure a consistent, safe, and effective approach to managing mental health concerns.

Who Leads on Mental Health

The ICC recognizes that not all Members have the resources to appoint a dedicated mental health professional to oversee their mental health program. Members are therefore encouraged to identify a qualified staff member or a staff member with an interest (preferably from the medical team) to take on the responsibility of leading mental health initiatives and providing support in this area.

This individual should have an active role and at the very least have the support of senior leaders in the organisation.

The person leading on mental health should play a key role in:

- Developing and communicating a mental health program.

- Periodically reviewing the mental health program to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

- Raising awareness and understanding through mental health activities, ICC organised webinars and resources and other online training.

- Developing psychologically safe environments.

- Conducting risk assessments and making recommendations in the best interest of the team's mental wellbeing.

- Identifying and clearly communicating/ signposting available mental health support services.

They should also:

- Be the point of contact for all mental health related matters.

- Know when and how to refer someone to professional help.

- Understand confidentiality and the limits of this.

- Be trustworthy and approachable.

In assigning a staff member to lead on mental health, members are encouraged to support them to engage in additional training and development as required. This could include the UKSI's Mental Health Champion program, to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support teams' mental well-being.

The person leading on mental health should be aware of the limits of their role. If they are not a qualified mental health professional, they should not attempt to diagnose or manage mental health issues independently. Instead, their role is to observe signs of concern, offer initial support, and refer the individual to appropriate expert help.

Conclusion

Developing a mental health program represents a meaningful commitment by Member Boards to the overall wellbeing and long-term success of its players, coaches, and support staff.

It indicates a clear commitment from the organisation, the support of leadership and encourages a safe environment where mental health is spoken about openly. It sets out protocols to ensure consistency, accountability and supports preparedness in case of an emergency. This guide has provided a framework to help Members create environments where mental health is understood, supported, and prioritised alongside physical performance.

By addressing the unique pressures of sport in general, such as high expectations, public pressure, injuries, and intense competition, mental health programs can help build resilience, reduce stigma, and empower individuals to seek help when needed. Remember for a mental health program and its support services to be truly effective, the organisation must actively adopt a culture of care, openness, and psychological safety.

Refer to Appendix A for a checklist on developing a mental health program.

Useful Resources

Below are some further resources which may be helpful in addition to this document:

- ICC Mental Health Awareness in Cricket
- **IOC mental health guidance for major sporting events**
- UKSI Self-care plan – attached to this document is an 'Energy Plan' which is a useful self-care tool to help you identify things that can boost and reduce your mental health.

References

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Appendix A

Checklist for Developing a Mental Health Program

☑ **Someone leading on mental health** - Identify a mental health lead or a champion and seek support from senior management.

☑ **Risk assessment** - Proactively conduct a mental health risk assessment and implement relevant mitigations.

☑ **Program objectives** - Define clear objectives for your mental health program to enable appropriate review.

☑ **Program monitoring and evaluation** - Evaluate the program's effectiveness in terms of its reach and engagement by seeking feedback and incorporate findings.

☑ **Education and awareness** - Provide education to all members of the teams, to raise mental health awareness, increase understanding and reduce stigma.

☑ **Psychological safety** - Encourage a safe environment where it is okay to speak about mental health without fear of judgement.

☑ **Support structures** - Ensure the team know what help is available, who they can contact, and how to reach out.

☑ **Screening** - Consider screening for mental health alongside physical health (where set-up to respond appropriately).

☑ **Continual informal monitoring** – Be aware of individuals who might be at increased risk of poor mental health (e.g. someone recovering from injury, facing personal issues, younger players etc.) and have a plan to best support them.

Appendix B - Risk Assessment

WHAT IS THE RISK? Consider travel, playing conditions, environmental conditions, team performance etc.	WHO IS AT RISK AND HOW?	RISK RATING 1 (Low) - 5 (High)	HOW CAN WE MITIGATE THE RISK?