

A photograph of AFL players in a huddle, overlaid with a blue tint. The players are wearing jerseys with 'AFL' and 'BHP' logos. The background features decorative white lines in the top left and bottom right corners.

# AFL Industry Mental Health Clinical Governance Framework

A guide for safety and  
clinical excellence

2 0 2 0 - 2 0 2 2



## Contents

- 3 Foreword
- 4 Introduction
- 6 Definition
- 8 Our Framework
- 10 Purpose
- 12 Application and Use
- 14 Stakeholders
- 16 Roles and Responsibilities
- 18 Summary
- 19 Glossary of Terms
- 21 Acknowledgements

# Foreword

---



**In 2019, a major long-term decision for the game was made around the welfare of our people.**

We have sought here in this document to acknowledge our dedication towards improving the overall industry's support of mental health and wellbeing for current and past male and female players, umpires, coaches and more than 3000 staff in administrative roles. Our game thrives because of the investment of people into Australian football, and it is our role and duty to invest into transforming the management of mental health and wellbeing for our industry.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to be 'G. McLachlan', written in a cursive style.

**Gillon McLachlan**

Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Football League

# Introduction

---

**A unified Clinical Governance Framework for our industry ensures the safety and quality of mental healthcare.**

The AFL Industry Mental Health Clinical Governance Framework (The Framework) outlines a set of guiding principles for the delivery of safe and high-quality mental healthcare services. Healthcare services in the AFL are complex, involve a diverse range of physical and mental health providers and a broad range of consumers (patients, clients, carers, families and the AFL community) with differing needs. For example, the unique healthcare management of AFL players is multidisciplinary and includes diverse providers within and external to the club environment. The AFL, AFLPA and AFL Clubs are the funders of mental healthcare and providers of many mental health services available to consumers in the industry. Multiple stakeholders are involved in the delivery of care, including but not limited to: the AFL, AFLPA, AFL Clubs, AFL Club doctors and psychologists, patients, carers and families. A unified industry framework ensures all stakeholders adhere to a set of common principles that ensure safe and excellent mental healthcare.



## Clinical Governance in the AFL Industry

The AFL Industry sits within the broader healthcare ecosystem, including the range of primary, tertiary and private healthcare settings who may be involved in delivering mental and physical care. The Framework acknowledges that consumers access mental healthcare outside the AFL Industry in the primary and tertiary health system. The complexity of the health industry that the Framework exists within is acknowledged and the foundational principles of clinical governance should be complementary, aligned and unifying. The Framework's purpose is to align mental healthcare under a set of guiding principles, consummate to good clinical governance, so that the principles of coordinated, effective, confidential and safe care underpin all mental healthcare. The Framework ensures there is a unified and strong system-wide commitment to continuous improvement and the safety and quality of mental healthcare. The Framework sits within the Clinical Governance for all healthcare in the industry.

Clinical governance in the Framework refers to a systematic and integrated process of accountability across the AFL industry for the provision of quality care to consumers and has a fundamental purpose of driving excellence and continuous improvement of consumer centred care. The clinical governance framework acknowledges the importance of individual and collective roles and responsibilities of consumers, clinicians, healthcare teams, managers, and the industry governing bodies in the delivery of mental healthcare that is based on the most up to date evidence, is safe and is continuously monitored and improved.

The AFL is the governing body of the Australian Football League elite competitions and the custodian of the sport of Australian football. The AFL industry is a work

environment associated with high public scrutiny, is highly competitive and necessarily encompasses a high performance culture. These unique environmental influences may be associated with unique stressors that impact the physical and mental health of individuals in the industry. These industry characteristics highlight the need for governance to ensure consistent quality of healthcare and reliable management of confidential health information.

### The Framework applies to the following stakeholders:

1. Providers: credentialed healthcare clinicians including but not limited to: doctors, psychologists, physiotherapists, nurses, nutritionists.
2. Consumers: patients, clients, families, carers and the AFL community; club staff, AFL staff, AFLPA staff, past AFL and AFLW players, AFL and AFLW players, AFL and AFLW talent pathway players, coaches and umpires. The diversity of consumers and their needs are acknowledged by the framework, ensuring the right treatment is provided at the right time, across the spectrum of mental healthcare.
3. Organisations and associations: AFL clubs, AFLPA, AFL, AFLDA, AFLCPA, AFLUA, AFLCA, EAP Providers.
4. Governing bodies and leaders within organisations and associations: Club Boards, AFL Commission, AFL Executive, Chief Psychiatrist AFL, AFLDA President/CEO, Chief Medical Officer AFL, Club Managers.

# Definition

---

## The definition of clinical governance:

“Clinical governance is the set of relationships and responsibilities established by a governing body and its industry stakeholders to ensure good clinical outcomes for all patients and consumers across the industry. It ensures that the community (in this case, the AFL industry) and health service organisations can be confident that systems are in place to deliver safe and high-quality health care, and continuously improve services. Clinical governance ensures that everyone – from frontline clinicians to managers and members of governing bodies – is accountable to patients and the community for assuring the delivery of health services that are safe, effective, integrated, high quality and continuously improving.”<sup>1</sup>



**The Framework outlines a set of guiding principles for the delivery of safe and high-quality mental healthcare services.**

<sup>1</sup>Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. National Model Clinical Governance Framework. Sydney: ACSQHC, 2017

# Corporate Governance



Figure 1: Clinical Governance  
In Overall Corporate Governance

# Our Framework

**The Framework<sup>2</sup> is underpinned by 7 pillars that support the delivery of safe and high-quality mental healthcare.**

The 7 pillars are:

- ▶ Regular and transparent auditing for gap analysis;
- ▶ Research and evaluation for service improvement and disseminating knowledge;
- ▶ Training for capacity development;
- ▶ Risk management;
- ▶ Information management to ensure confidential and secure collection, storage and use of clinical data;
- ▶ Clinical effectiveness for best practice in clinical care; risk management to mitigate and manage risks across the industry; and
- ▶ Clinical accountability for openness and transparency of care to ensure high quality service.

The patient or consumer is continuously supported by the pillars. The Framework is based on the principle of focusing on consumer experience throughout the continuum of care.

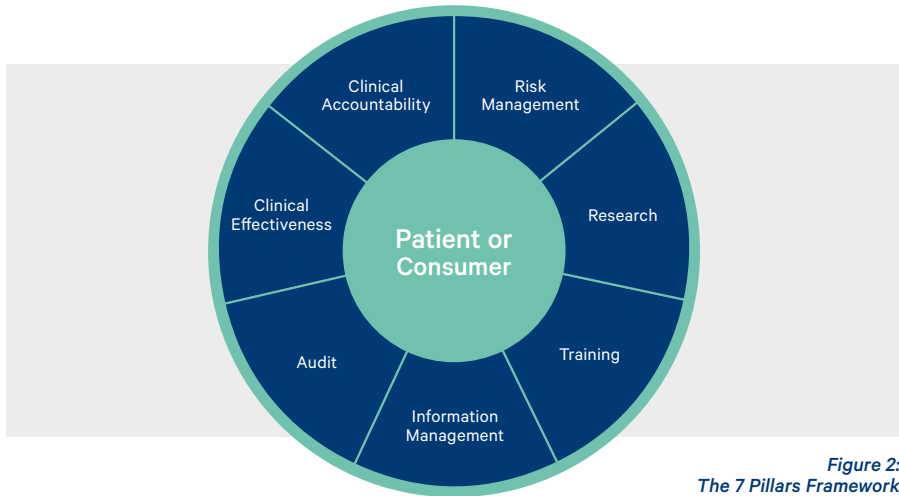
Clinical excellence requires systems to support the delivery of accessible, safe, high-quality mental healthcare. Within a well-governed structure, everyone, including frontline providers in clubs and the private health sector employers and the governing body, is accountable for their contribution to the safety and quality of care delivered to consumers. Good clinical governance provides consumers and stakeholders with confidence in the governing body and the mental healthcare providers in the ecosystem.

<sup>2</sup>Gray, C. What is Clinical Governance? BMJ 2005;330:s254



**Good clinical governance provides consumers and stakeholders with confidence in the governing body and the mental healthcare providers in the ecosystem.**





**Figure 2:**  
**The 7 Pillars Framework**

<b>Audit</b>	Auditing of the provision of healthcare delivery within the ecosystem is vital to ensuring that best treatments are provided safely and confidentially whilst following best practice guidelines where applicable. Auditing can be done at specified intervals as self audits or in more complex matters, as external audits.
<b>Clinical Effectiveness</b>	Ensuring that clinical services are the most effective in this ecosystem. Cost benefit analysis and development of efficient systems to deliver clinical care
<b>Clinical accountability</b>	Process analysis, implementation of evidence-based practices, and a clear accountability system are effective tools not only for decreasing error rates, but also for improving effectiveness.
<b>Risk Management</b>	The introduction of effective reporting systems is a cornerstone of safe practice within hospitals and other healthcare organisations. Reporting can help to identify hazards and risks. Mechanisms for early identification, systems for reporting and prompt and effective management of clinical risks is vital to ensure safe and effective care.
<b>Research</b>	Development of new clinical information based on rigorous research by excellent researchers to add to evidence base and best practice.
<b>Training</b>	Enabling appropriate upskilling of all involved in delivery of healthcare to meet constantly evolving standards of healthcare. As new procedures and guidelines develop in this ecosystem this will ensure the competence of all involved in delivering better outcomes.
<b>Information Management</b>	Confidential storage, access and utilisation of health information using state of the art systems.

# Purpose

---

**The Framework's purpose is to align the industry's mental healthcare under a unified set of guiding principles, consummate to good clinical governance.**

The ultimate purpose of Clinical Governance is to ensure that consumers receive the highest quality of mental healthcare.

The Framework aims to support the entire AFL industry to work towards an integrated and consumer centred system of care. The Framework describes the systems and processes across the AFL industry that are essential for all stakeholders to achieve integrated corporate and clinical governance systems (see Figure 1), and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the industry.

The Framework has been established to:

- ▶ Achieve the best possible health outcomes for consumers and patients receiving mental healthcare
- ▶ Ensure planning and resource allocation supports the achievement of outcomes
- ▶ Ensure the provision of mental healthcare services that are outcome orientated, evidence based and clinically justified
- ▶ Support rigorous measurement of performance outcomes
- ▶ Ensure strong clinical leadership and ownership
- ▶ Ensure continuous improvement in quality and safety
- ▶ Promote organisational culture that supports consumer safety and quality improvement initiatives through committee structures, systems and processes
- ▶ Ensure compliance with legislative and departmental policy requirements and accreditation of mental healthcare providers
- ▶ Ensure all participants in the AFL industry have clearly defined roles and responsibilities including the essential partnership between consumers and healthcare providers and employers
- ▶ Ensure healthcare professionals have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the management of consumers



# Application and use

---

**All mental healthcare services contracted by the AFL, AFLPA and AFL Clubs are governed by the Framework.**

The maintenance and exploration of relationships with external providers also operates under of the guiding principles of the Framework. The Framework provides a unified structure for relevant processes and procedures to be implemented and monitored as recommended by the AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee and the AFL Chief Psychiatrist. The Framework operates complementary to the regulatory role of AHPRA for registered health practitioners.

The Framework can be used by providers, organisations and governing bodies to support effective clinical governance and improve the safety and quality of care. This Framework will be supported by resources developed by the AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee and the AFL Mental Health Team to support application of the Framework in specific organisational settings (e.g. the AFL, AFL Clubs, etc.).



“

**The AFL Industry  
Mental Health Clinical  
Governance Framework  
is aligned to the AFL  
Industry Mental Health  
Strategy 2020-2022.**

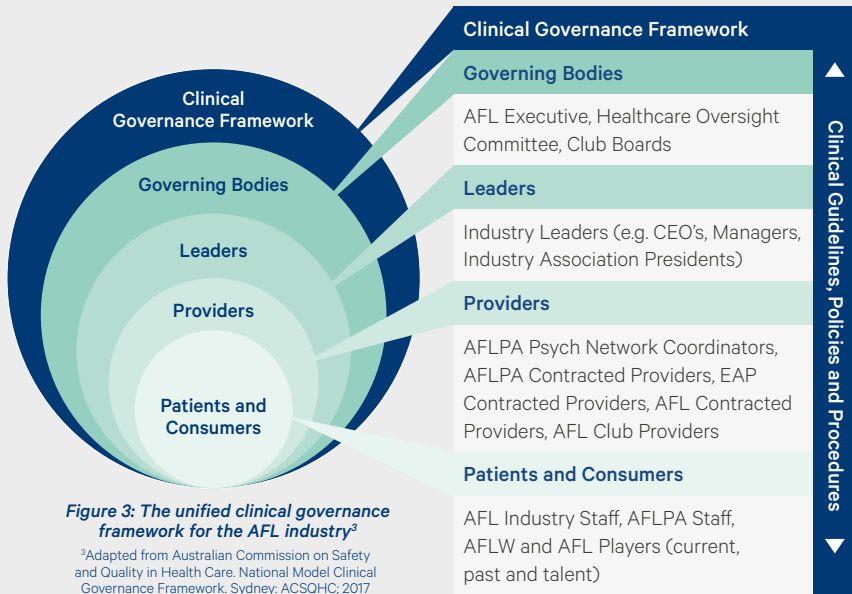
”

# Stakeholders

**Clinical excellence requires systems to support the delivery of accessible, safe, high-quality mental healthcare.**

Within a well-governed structure, everyone, including frontline providers in clubs, is accountable for their contribution to the safety and quality of care delivered to consumers. Good clinical governance provides consumers and stakeholders with confidence in the governing body and the mental healthcare providers in the ecosystem.

The Framework brings together all stakeholders in the AFL industry under a unified set of policies and procedures to ensure a consistent and integrated approach to the delivery of high quality and safe care.



**Figure 3: The unified clinical governance framework for the AFL industry<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. National Model Clinical Governance Framework. Sydney. ACSQHC; 2017



# Roles and Responsibilities

Title	Role
<b>AFL</b>	<p>The AFL is the governing body responsible for ensuring the providers of mental healthcare across the industry to deliver safe and high-quality healthcare. The AFL has a responsibility to lead the industry through governance structures and policy reform in order to support consumer safety, quality improvement initiatives, compliance with legislative requirements and benchmarking accreditation of mental healthcare providers.</p> <p>The AFL has a role to ensure policies and systems are in place to achieve clinical excellence, including committees and governance structures that have industry representation. The primary committee responsible for the Framework is the AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee. The Healthcare Oversight Committee reports into the AFL Executive.</p>
<b>AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Oversee the safe and excellent delivery of all healthcare</li> <li>▶ Oversee adherence to all healthcare policies and procedures</li> <li>▶ Conduct clinical practice audits and clinical reviews to ensure continuous improvement and evaluation</li> <li>▶ Manage a complaints process for healthcare services and providers</li> </ul>
<b>AFL Chief Medical Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Chair the healthcare oversight committee and have overall leadership of healthcare provision and governance</li> <li>▶ Provide clinical leadership</li> <li>▶ Contribute to research and evaluation</li> <li>▶ Disseminate knowledge and innovation</li> </ul>
<b>AFL Chief Psychiatrist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Promote continuous improvement in the quality and safety of mental health service provision</li> <li>▶ Ensure mental healthcare services are outcome orientated, evidence based and clinically justified</li> <li>▶ Report to the AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee regarding COL issues or ethical conflicts</li> <li>▶ Provide clinical leadership</li> <li>▶ Contribute to research and evaluation</li> <li>▶ Disseminate knowledge and innovation</li> <li>▶ Conduct training for capacity development</li> </ul>
<b>AFL Mental Health Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ensure mental healthcare services are outcome orientated, evidence based and clinically justified</li> <li>▶ Implement mental healthcare policy reform across all stakeholders to ensure clinical excellence and safety</li> <li>▶ Monitor the provision of mental health services in order to improve quality and safety</li> <li>▶ Develop and provide information and education to build capacity and promote improved quality and safety</li> <li>▶ Promote the rights of people receiving mental health treatment in AFL the industry</li> <li>▶ Provide clinical and organisational leadership</li> <li>▶ Lead research and evaluation agenda</li> <li>▶ Disseminate knowledge and innovation</li> <li>▶ Conduct training for capacity development</li> </ul>
<b>AFL Clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be responsible for ensuring that the systems that support the delivery of healthcare are informed by established principles of clinical excellence</li> <li>▶ Develop an internal clinical governance framework to guide all club healthcare delivery</li> <li>▶ Align their policies and procedures with the AFL Healthcare Oversight Committee recommendations in the context of their club environment</li> <li>▶ Implement and comply with confidentiality and informed consent policies</li> </ul>



Title	Role
<b>Healthcare Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be responsible for the safety and quality of their own professional practice, and professional codes of conduct</li> <li>▶ Be responsible for upholding their professional registration, professional indemnity insurance and continuing professional development requirements</li> <li>▶ Align all service provision with clinical governance policies and procedures</li> <li>▶ Participate in auditing, evaluations and review to ensure clinical excellence and safety</li> <li>▶ Assist in the provision of training and education to promote improved quality and safety</li> </ul>
<b>AFLDA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide support to the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Medical Officer in the development, implementation and monitoring of healthcare policies and guidelines</li> <li>▶ Provide direct support to the clinicians to ensure delivery of safe, high-quality clinical care across all clubs</li> <li>▶ Provide a conduit for feedback to the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Medical Officer regarding issues with implementation and/or compliance with healthcare policies and guidelines</li> <li>▶ Assist in the provision of training and education to promote improved quality and safety</li> <li>▶ Disseminate information regarding policy, performance and provision of services</li> </ul>
<b>AFLPA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Deliver consumer-centred mental health programs and services in a safe and effective manner</li> <li>▶ Advocate the principles of service independence and choice on behalf of our current and past players</li> <li>▶ Ensure appropriate, safe and confidential management of member mental health information</li> <li>▶ Support members, clubs and industry stakeholders by providing mental health expertise, leadership and advocacy, training/education and partnerships to deliver optimal mental health outcomes.</li> <li>▶ Employ evidence-based practices in the design and delivery of the highest quality programs and services</li> <li>▶ Shape optimal environments, working closely with members, clubs and industry stakeholders</li> <li>▶ Conduct or commission research to improve the accountability, delivery and outcomes of mental health services</li> <li>▶ Engage in relevant community work which is aligned to the needs and interests of our members</li> </ul>
<b>AFLCPA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide support to the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Medical Officer in the development, implementation and monitoring of mental healthcare policies and guidelines</li> <li>▶ Provide direct support to clinicians to ensure delivery of safe, high-quality clinical care across all clubs</li> <li>▶ Provide a conduit for feedback to the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Medical Officer regarding issues with implementation and/or compliance with healthcare policies and guidelines</li> <li>▶ Assist in the provision of training and education to promote improved quality and safety</li> </ul>
<b>Consumers and Patients</b>	<p>Consumers and patients participate as crucial partners in mental healthcare and governance and as partners in the broader AFL Industry Mental Health Strategy and participate in research, design and feedback on mental health service models. Consumer representation on the Industry mental Health Steering Committee is foundational to ensuring consumer involvement at the senior governance level. Consumers and patients are empowered to participate to the extent that they choose in partnership with their mental health provider. Core principles in partnering with consumers and patients receiving mental healthcare include empowering the person to manage their own mental health and implement goals focused on optimising function and recovery. Consumers and patients also have the responsibility to actively seek help and engage collaboratively in the clinical care recommended and provided by their clinicians to ensure best possible outcomes. This extends to active participation in compliance related to the safe and high quality delivery of care. These partnerships can be in their own care with their healthcare provider and/or in organisational governance (e.g. mental health steering committee membership).</p>

## Summary

The inaugural AFL Industry Mental Health Clinical Governance Framework ensures there is a strong system-wide commitment to continuous improvement and the safety and quality of mental healthcare. Ongoing monitoring, review and revision of the Framework is required during the three year period of implementation to ensure it adequately achieves the vision of confidential, safe and excellent mental healthcare for all stakeholders in the AFL industry.

# Glossary of Terms

---

## **AFLCA**

The AFL Coaches Association, representative body of the AFL Coaches.

## **AFLCPA**

The AFL Club Psychologists Association is a representative body that supports AFL and AFLW club psychologists in providing comprehensive evidence-based psychological services to AFL Clubs including but not limited to mental health, performance, wellbeing, psychometric testing, leadership and culture.

## **AFLDA**

The AFL Doctors Association is a representative body that supports AFL and AFLW club doctors in providing the best medical care for players.

## **AFLPA**

The AFL Players Association is the representative body for current male and female players and past AFL players. AFL players believe that, as key stakeholders in the AFL industry, they deserve to have their voices heard on important issues pertaining to them and the game, and the AFLPA exist to champion that voice to other key stakeholders and to the broader community.

## **AFLUA**

The AFL Umpire Association, representative body of AFL Umpires

## **AHPRA**

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, established by section 23(1) of the National Law.

## **Clinician**

A healthcare provider, trained as a health professional, including registered and non-registered practitioners. Clinicians may provide care as an employee, a contractor or a credentialed healthcare provider, or under other working arrangements.

## **Consumer**

A person who has used, or may potentially use, health services, or is a carer for a patient using health services. Includes but is not limited to: patients, clients, families, carers and the AFL community; club staff, AFL staff, AFLPA staff, past AFL and AFLW players, AFL and AFLW players, AFL and AFLW talent pathway players, coaches and umpires.

## **Credentialing**

The formal process used to verify the qualifications, experience, professional standing, competencies and other relevant professional attributes of clinicians, so that the organisation can form a view about the clinician's competence, performance and professional suitability to provide safe, high-quality healthcare services.

## **Healthcare**

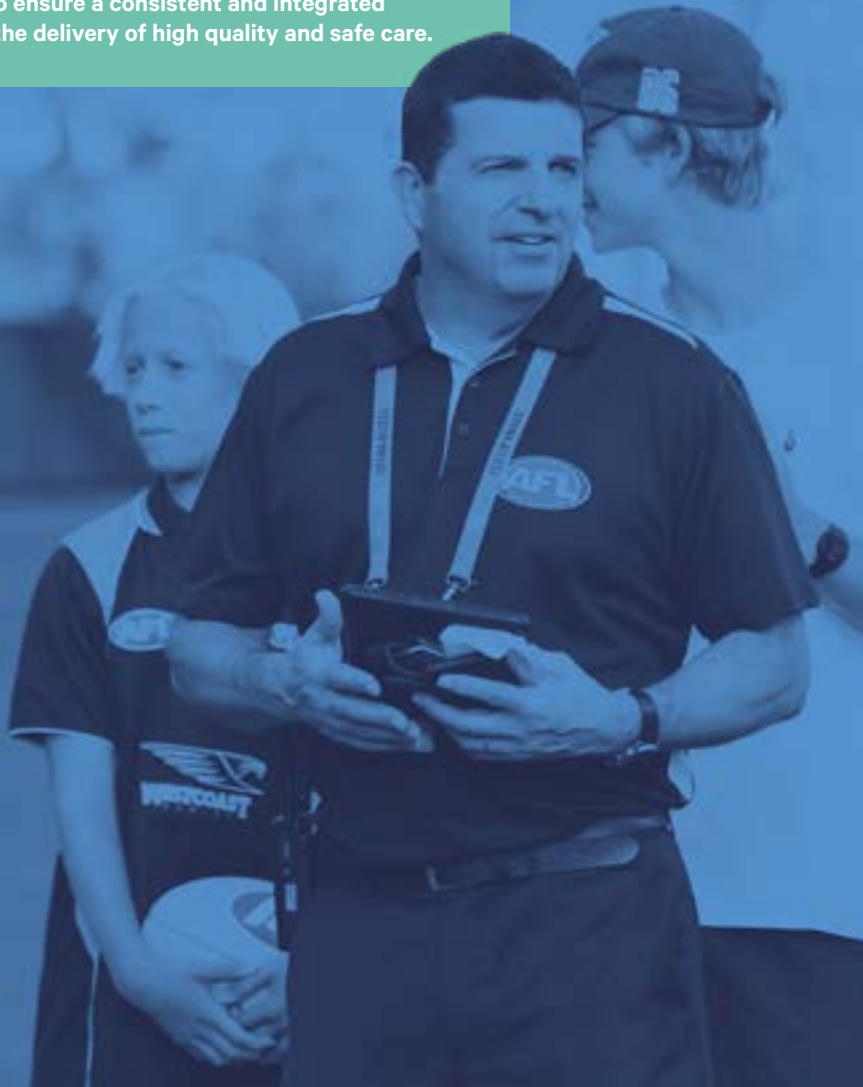
The prevention, treatment and management of illness and injury, and the preservation of mental and physical wellbeing through the services offered by clinicians, such as medical, nursing and allied health professionals.

## **Patient**

A person who is receiving care in a health service organisation.

“

The Framework brings together all healthcare providers in the AFL industry under a unified set of policies and procedures to ensure a consistent and integrated approach to the delivery of high quality and safe care.



# Acknowledgements

**The AFL Mental Health team (Dr Kate Hall – AFL Head of Mental Health & Wellbeing; Dr Ranjit Menon – AFL Chief Psychiatrist) would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following members of the AFL Clinical Governance Working Group in the development of the Framework.**

Dr Peter Harcourt (Chair) – AFL Chief Medical Officer  
Professor Malcolm Hopwood – Professor of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne  
Dr Adam Deacon – Club Psychiatrist, Collingwood FC  
Dr Michael Makdissi – AFLDA Chief Executive Officer  
Dr Andrew Potter – AFLDA Representative  
Dr Barry Rigby – Club Doctor, Gold Coast Suns, AFLDA President  
Dr Anik Shawdon – Medical Officer, AFL Talent Pathway, AFLDA  
Dr David Bolzonello – Medical Consultant AFL Umpires  
Dr Tania Gibbie – VIC, NSW & QLD AFL IDP Psychology Coordinator  
Neil McLean – Club Psychologist, Fremantle FC  
Dr Brendon Dellar – WA & SA AFL IDP Psychology Coordinator  
Lisa Stevens – Club Psychologist, Western Bulldogs FC;  
AFL Club Psychologists Association President  
Matt McGregor – AFLPA Psychology Coordinator  
Vikki Ryall – headspace Executive Director Clinical Practice  
Dr Deirdre Ryan – Principal Psychologist, ARUNA;  
AFL Integrity and Respect and Responsibility Psychology Coordinator  
Zaita Anderson – AFL Strategy Lead  
Dr David Hughes – Chief Medical Officer, Australian Institute of Sport  
Mr Hayden Opie AM – Senior Fellow, Sports Law, University of Melbourne

