Enhancing veterinary student wellbeing: students as partners

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Abstract:
The Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program involves a demanding 4 years of full-time post-graduate study. Previous student surveys have indicated that this student population is at high risk of poor mental health. The Melbourne Veterinary School has introduced a suite of initiatives to enhance veterinary student wellbeing in partnership with enrolled students. The transition phase into the course begins with an orientation week designed and lead by a team of academic staff and current students who are progressing into the second year of the program. A peer mentoring scheme partners all students with a near-peer in the cohort immediately ahead. Mentorship training is provided for student volunteer mentors, and associated mentoring and networking events are conceptualised and organised by a team of student representatives. The school also funded a group of first year students to undertake an accredited mental health first aid training course. In 2018, a student wellbeing grant initiative was also introduced. Funds were made available for students to apply for one of five $1000 grants for an initiative to enhance veterinary student wellbeing. A committee of staff and student volunteers reviewed the applications, and the final selection was conducted through a student body vote. Each of these initiatives contributes to the creation of a strong student cohort experience, in addition to building the capacity of student partners to lead and actively contribute to their student community. Collaborating with students as partners in the design and delivery of support initiatives has greatly enhanced student engagement with wellbeing activities.

Biography:
Laura is a lecturer in veterinary biosciences at the Melbourne Veterinary School, with research interests in innovative teaching practice. She is the Director Student Experience (Veterinary Pre-Clinical) with responsibility for enhancing student support within the program.