We agree with the proposed vision “Better mental health and wellbeing for all”. “For all” means that the vision and Strategy should be inclusive. Therefore, the final Strategy document would benefit greatly from specific references to the Gaelic language and its contribution to mental health and wellbeing.

Language and culture create self-esteem, nurture self-confidence, define identity and improve quality of life. Gaelic is part of the heritage of Scotland. It increases wellbeing for Gaelic users, learners, and supporters. Gaelic contributes positively to what these people think and feel about their lives.

The overview to the consultation states that “We want the Strategy to be equality and human rights-based”. This means equal respect for Gaelic within “rights”. This reflects that human rights have a linguistic basis rather than simply a cultural one.

Acknowledgement of Gaelic within the Strategy will contribute to one of its desired Outcomes for Communities. That is, “Communities value and respect diversity, so that people, including people with mental health conditions, are able to live free from stigma and discrimination”. As an example, it is generally recognised that being able to converse in one’s chosen language (i.e. Gaelic) can be a great contributor to wellbeing at times of illness or distress and ensuring equality of treatment.

Taking account of Gaelic in the Strategy will reflect Scottish Government policy: “The Scottish Government recognises that Gaelic is an integral part of Scotland’s heritage, national identity and current...
Gaelic is a national language which is spoken across Scotland.

References to Gaelic in the Strategy would reflect continuing growth in Gaelic learning and interest in Gaelic language and culture.

Gaelic Medium Education (GME) continues to expand across the country. It is a recognised and successful sector within Scottish education.

In nursery, primary and secondary schools the number of GME pupils grew from 4,328 in 2011-12 to 6,272 in 2020-21. That is an increase of 45%, with primary pupil numbers having grown by more than 50%.

The demand for Gaelic learning is also evident in the uptake for the Duolingo language learning website. At March 2022 there were 431,000 active learners on the course. That compares to around 87,000 people in Scotland with Gaelic skills at the 2011 Census.

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey also found that since 2012:

- The proportion who say they can speak at least the odd word of Gaelic has doubled from 15% to 30%.
- The proportion who say they can understand at least a little Gaelic has increased from 25% to 41%.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents said that they would like to improve their Gaelic skills.

The Engaging with Gaelic Online Survey covers young people in Scotland aged between 11 and 18 years. The most recent one found that:

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2 https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/duolingo-scottish-gaelic-course-passes-one-million-learners-3624358
3 https://youngscot.net/ysobservatory/a-bhith-an-sas-le-ghaidhlig-air-loidhne-engaging-with-gaelic-online
5 https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/duolingo-scottish-gaelic-course-passes-one-million-learners-3624358
6 https://youngscot.net/ysobservatory/a-bhith-an-sas-le-ghaidhlig-air-loidhne-engaging-with-gaelic-online
- A third of respondents were learning Gaelic. Almost two thirds of them wanted to learn because they see Gaelic an important part of Scottish culture and national identity.
- More than half (59%) of the respondents who could not speak Gaelic stated that they were interested in learning the language.
- Almost three quarters of all respondents rated Gaelic culture and heritage as quite or very valuable.

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021: Public Attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland found that 79% of people think Gaelic is important to Scotland’s cultural heritage (of which 34% say “very important” and 45% “fairly important”).

Gaelic users, learners and supporters have great pride in the Gaelic language and culture, contributing to their self-esteem and wellbeing.

As Visit Scotland’s Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland states “Many internationally recognised icons, such as the kilt, whisky, tartan and bagpipes, have come from Gaelic culture” In addition “Gaelic is also embedded in our world-famous landscape and cities with instant recognition for the likes of Loch Ness (Loch Nis), Culloden (Cùil Lodair) whose names in English remain close to their original Gaelic”. This helps people connect with and understand the places and traditions of where they live or visit. Again, this contributes to their wellbeing.

There is also great pride in what the Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland terms the “dynamic, contemporary Gaelic cultural scene spanning music, festivals such as Celtic Connections and Fèisean, regional and national Mòds” among a range of activities. Those involved in Gaelic arts and culture sector are keenly aware of the role it played in supporting people’s wellbeing during lockdowns in the pandemic.

4 https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/news/SSAS/ Bha seo air a dèanamh suas de dh’agallamhan le daoine aos 18+ le cuideam air na toraidhean a bhith riochdachail de dh’Alba a thaobh feartan sòiseo-eaconamach
5https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/gaelic-tourism-strategy.pdf
9 https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/news/SSAS/. This comprised interviews with people aged 18+ with the results weighted to be representative of Scotland in terms of socio-economic characteristics
10 https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/gaelic-tourism-strategy.pdf
Finally, Bòrd na Gàidhlig believes that it is essential that the Gaelic speaking public and patients have access to mental health services and support through the medium of the Gaelic language. This would be particularly pertinent in care homes and hospitals in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Whilst this may prove challenging in staffing and resources, plans should be included in line with the strategy to address these fundamental needs.