

Participating in community arts

To promote mental health and wellbeing

What is mental health?

Mental health is the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. It provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just.

How do these projects promote mental health?

The Community Arts Participation Scheme contributes to improved mental health and wellbeing through facilitating social inclusion.

What does social inclusion mean?

A socially inclusive society is one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so that they can live in dignity.

What is the link between social inclusion and health?

By providing emotional support, companionship and opportunities for meaningful social engagement, social networks have an influence on self-esteem, coping effectiveness, depression, distress and sense of wellbeing (Berkman & Glass 2000).

How many people experience social isolation?

The proportion of people living alone is increasing markedly (ABS 2002). While living and being alone can be a positive choice for many, rates of mental and behavioural problems and psychological stress are higher among adults who live alone than in adults living in a household with at least one other person (ABS 2003).



Photo by John Sones.

VicHealth promotes mental health and wellbeing by supporting participation in community arts activity. Grants are provided to assist community members to work in collaboration with artists to create an event that expresses or raises issues important to that community.

Through this process people are provided with the opportunity to:

- get involved in creative group activities
- access supportive relationships
- build self-esteem and self-confidence
- develop skills and capacity to express and celebrate their culture
- increase a sense of self-determination and control.

There are 35 VicHealth community arts projects currently operating across Victoria. At least 7,000 people participate in these projects creating theatre, song, visual arts, circus and multimedia activity. Another 30,000 people attend the performances developed by project participants.

“Here we feel we are somebody...that we are part of a community, that we’ll be heard.” participant

Community Arts Participation Scheme



ABS 2002, *Australian Demographic Statistics: Who'll be Home Alone in 2021?*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

ABS 2003, *National Health Survey: Mental Health*, Cat. no. 4811.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics Canberra.

Berkman LF & Glass T 2000, *Social integration, social networks, social support & health in Social Epidemiology*, eds Berkman, LF, Kawachi I, Oxford University Press. New York.

Connecting through music and dancing

“When we dance, we’re confident in ourselves.” *project participant*



The **Anti Racism Action Band** is a youth performing arts project involving young people from 30 different cultures in the north and north western suburbs of Melbourne. The project provides participants with the opportunity to develop creative skills and talent while at the same time addressing the problems they face as young people.

Through the teaching and performing of rap, beat box, Derbakki (Arabic drumming), spoken word, belly dance, hip hop, video and comic monologue, the skill base, confidence and self-esteem of participants is increased. By connecting with young people from many backgrounds, participants also get insight into the lives and experiences of others. Misunderstandings and preconceived notions of other cultures are often dispelled and friendships created.

“There wasn’t anyone in A.R.A.B who left after the last *Yallah Shabiba!* performance that didn’t make new friends.” *project participant*

Since the band began in 2004, 170 young people have engaged in 50 public performances to audiences exceeding 11,000 people. These performances not only enhance the mental health and wellbeing of the young people involved but also inform audiences of the positive benefits of working together, and the damaging mental health impacts of discrimination.

Performances have included the 5th International Women’s Health Conference, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Victorian Police Arabic Culture Training Course, Harmony Day events, Fawkner Cluster of Schools Teacher Professional Development, Club Wild, SBS Radio Anniversary Broadcast, Darebin Music Feast, International Women’s Day events and the Australian Arabic Council’s Media Award Ceremony.

The recent show *Yallah Shabiba!*, a narrative about race and the universality of friendship, was performed to 2300 secondary school students in school gymnasiums and town halls in Reservoir, Glenroy and Broadmeadows.