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VICHEALTH AND ARTS VICTORIA PROPEL ARTS INTO A NEW ERA

An ambitious plan to boost the physical fitness of Victorians through the arts will be unveiled in Melbourne today, as VicHealth and Arts Victoria team up to launch *VicHealth's Active Arts Strategy 2014-2017*.

A key part of the strategy combines our love of digital technology with the latest trends in design innovation from around the globe, to develop arts projects that act as a gateway to regular exercise.

To celebrate the release of its new arts investment strategy, VicHealth is offering funding support to arts organisations with a clever idea to get people physically active. The new Arts Innovation Challenge opens for entries in early November.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said VicHealth has always been interested in the role of the arts to promote good mental health, with a focus on social connection, but this new strategy goes further and looks at the additional physical benefits of active and participatory arts.

"When we started funding arts programs in 1987, our aim was to work with the arts to communicate health messages.

"Since 1997 we have focused more on promoting the intrinsic mental health benefits of being involved in arts activities and trying to increase participation and audiences.

"Participation in the arts promotes creativity, confidence, skills development, social participation and social connection.

"Now we're moving into a new era, where our focus is on the physical health benefits of active and participatory arts. These include digital platforms, community level initiatives, and mass participation in creative and active arts, such as dance and circus."

Victorian Minister for the Arts, The Hon. Heidi Victoria, said art is about much more than spectacle.

"Arts participation is proven to benefit mental health by decreasing stress, anxiety and depression and reduces social isolation by bringing people together. Evidence is also emerging about how creative pursuits can lead to more physical activity," Minister Victoria said.

"VicHealth's new strategy aligns with the National Arts and Health Framework launched by all state and territory Arts and Health Ministers in June. The framework recognises the role the arts can play across the health care continuum and the benefits of collaboration between the arts and health sectors."

About the VicHealth Arts Innovation Challenge

The VicHealth Arts Innovation Challenge will seed innovative arts activities to increase physical activity using digital platforms.

The Challenge is a call to action to arts practitioners, who will be invited to submit a creative 'pitch' for digital media based ways to increase physical activity and improve social connection. Entries will open in November.

Each successful pitch will receive a grant to take the pitch from idea to prototype.

VicHealth will then support the best of these prototypes to move into proof-of-concept testing, with further practical and financial support provided by VicHealth and other partners.