

VicHealth's response to the inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) commends the Federal Government for undertaking an inquiry into Australia's creative and cultural industries and institutions at this critical time.

VicHealth has a proud history of working across sectors to promote health and advance our illness prevention efforts. We have long recognised the health and wellbeing benefits of arts participation, and since our inception in 1987 we have been working closely with the arts sector to create access and opportunity for all Victorians. Our hope is that initiatives that prove successful in Victoria can be replicated and scaled elsewhere in the country.

VicHealth has worked in partnership with a diverse range of organisations – large and small – and ever increasing diversification across the broader arts, cultural sector and creative industries. Our current and recent activities have ranged in focus from zines to online documentaries, app development for mobile devices to touring theatre productions, festivals to mentorship programs, and everything in between.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the catalyst for significant health and wellbeing challenges within the community, in many instances highlighting existing inequities. These unprecedented circumstances require multifaceted and innovative solutions that we know the arts, cultural sector and creative industries are capable of delivering.

This submission has been divided into two parts:

Part 1 – Responses to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

Part 2 – An outline of our current action areas in the arts

Part 1 – Responses to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

Background

- The benefits of arts engagement span mental, social and physical health as well as health determinate outcome areas such as knowledge and skills development, identity and economic indicators.¹
- These areas of benefit are in turn influenced by a range of possible confounders and effect modifiers including age, gender, location, education, income, occupation, marital status, number of children, general health, health behaviours, engagement in other activities and events.²
- There is an increasing evidence base on the wellbeing benefits of participation in the arts. For example, a recent Australian study found that involvement in the arts can reduce anxiety, stress, pain and mortality.³
- The arts also create opportunities for people to expand their social networks and develop new friendships, which can provide social support and impact positively on health and wellbeing.

Existing policy environment

We align our approaches with those detailed in the *National Arts and Health Framework*. This Framework, which VicHealth played a role in developing and disseminating, has been endorsed by all Australian Governments. It provides a strong platform for strengthening the relationship between the arts and health, a position for which VicHealth has been a long-time advocate.

Response to the terms of reference

The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them

The Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR) released an analysis showing cultural and creative activity contributed \$111.7 billion to Australia's economy in 2016–2017, a 30% increase since 2008–2009.⁴ These extraordinary figures will have no doubt taken an enormous hit as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is worth noting that many of the people who work in the creative sector and spill-over industries are either young and/or engaged through short-term 'gig economy' contracts, therefore living in precarious economic circumstances.

Among the challenges faced in rebuilding the sector is a tacit acknowledge that the arts, cultural sector and creative industries are a complex ecology with a variety of needs and strengths. It is of critical importance at this time that these sectors are not abandoned to market forces and that training and employment needs are addressed in a manner that is inclusive and developed through consultation with genuine sector needs.

¹Davies, C et al. 2014, 'The art of being healthy: a qualitative study to develop a thematic framework for understanding the relationship between health and the arts', *BMJ Open*; vol. 4, no. 4:e004790, doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004790.

³ Mills, D 2011, *Joining the policy dots: Strengthening the contribution of the arts to individual and community health and wellbeing*. Submission on behalf of The Arts and Health Foundation to the National Cultural Policy discussion paper, viewed 21 October 2020, <http://static.placestories.com/pool/story/0005/0018570/lo/doc.pdf>

⁴ Bureau of Communications and Arts Research 2018, *Cultural and creative activity in Australia 2008-09 to 2016-17*, viewed 21 October 2020. <https://www.communications.gov.au/publications/cultural-and-creative-activity-australia-2008-09-2016-17>

VicHealth recommendation: Introduce additional questions to the Australian Census under Income and Work and Unpaid Work to gather data on creative practice, hours worked, and creative and cultural output, thereby increasing our understanding of the contributions made by artists and creative practitioners.

VicHealth recommendation: Conduct a Productivity Commission review or industry mapping to improve our understanding of the full scope and scale of the creative and cultural industries.

The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them

Through our long-standing commitment to the arts, VicHealth aims to improve population health and reduce health inequities by:

- increasing participation and diversity in the arts through the development of strong partnerships between the creative sector and the broader community
- supporting creative initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, encourage dialogue around health-related issues and increase health literacy
- ensuring that arts and cultural settings are healthy and welcoming environments.

A recent VicHealth evidence review found that arts can have positive impacts on healthy eating, physical activity, mental wellbeing and social health, as well as on preventing tobacco use and harm from alcohol.⁵ This builds on a wealth of knowledge variously demonstrating the benefits of the arts in other health related domains such as:

- overcoming social isolation and loneliness
- providing job opportunities for at-risk youth
- improving educational engagement for school students
- reducing recidivism after imprisonment
- supporting place-based revitalisation projects and community pride, and so much more.

From our experience, cross-sector partnerships play an integral role in the effective use of the arts and creative industries for health promotion by increasing the quality of project outcomes and broadening community reach.

VicHealth recommendation: Develop a culture of mutual benefit by looking to review the mandate of Creative Partnerships Australia so that it also acts as a brokerage service for the development of creative partnerships across government, NGOs and the private sector in addition to its current financial investment focus.

This role could alternatively be performed by the establishment of another purpose-specific agency by the Office for the Arts, or funding the delivery of this service through existing peak bodies/service agencies across Australia.

The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government

For many years VicHealth has worked across multiple layers of government to ensure the best individual and community health and wellbeing outcomes. Securing alignment of policy objectives is only possible by

⁵ VicHealth 2020, *The arts and creative industries in health promotion – evidence review*, viewed 21 October 2020, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/arts-evidence-review>

ensuring all parties have a seat at the table and that the directions developed by those parties focus on long-term benefits.

VicHealth recommendation: Acknowledge the pivotal role local government plays in the development of the creative sector and the health and wellbeing benefits subsequently delivered to the community by expanding the Meeting of Cultural Ministers to include permanent representation from the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

VicHealth recommendation: Complement the expanded Meeting of Cultural Ministers with a forum that includes all ministers with cultural portfolios such as tourism, regional development, cities and education.

The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries

A soon to be published report from Theatre Network Australia details that approximately 70% of creative projects scheduled for 2020 were cancelled or postponed, and that 83% of arts workers who have jobs outside of their creative practice lost work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary findings from a similar report by consulting firm EY documents that two out of every three jobs in the live entertainment sector have been lost this year and that 2020 losses in the live event space are expected to total \$23 billion.

Significant portions of the arts, cultural sector and creative industries have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. While large crowd gatherings remain difficult and as long as state and international borders remain closed recovery will be slow.

But as with the broader economy these burdens have not been equally distributed with some portions of the sector being able to persevere more easily.

The disruption caused by the pandemic will have a lasting impact not only on the sector itself but also on how the community consumes and engages with culture. Consequently there are critical short and long term approaches to minimising the damage caused.

VicHealth recommendation: Consider extending the JobKeeper program for performing arts and live entertainment industry workers beyond the March cut-off date to ensure recovery is quicker when it is possible.

VicHealth recommendation: Develop a National Arts and Culture Plan, similar to *Sport 2030*, to be implemented across the Australian Government, with states and territory governments, the Australia Council for the Arts and the wider arts and cultural industries.

Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment

Digital technologies have changed the way we live, increased our access to a diverse range of content and broken down barriers between our real and virtual worlds. Space, place and time have been transcended in ways that would have been inconceivable to previous generations. Digital technologies present new and ever-changing opportunities for community and audience engagement, data transparency, production and documentation.

Though the digital divide of a decade ago has now largely been bridged with many consumer-based technologies having since reached saturation point, there are still pockets of isolation within the community which we should remain cognisant of and attentive to.

While some creative industry settings embrace these changes, others struggle with the financial resources and skills development required, or consciously choose not to engage. As we work toward a new COVID-normal, embracing digital technologies will be more important than ever. Therefore support needs to be provided to ensure adoption and delivery occurs.

VicHealth recommendation: The arts sector should be specifically identified and supported to harness its content creation potential, and to link this with the proliferation of digital platforms.

VicHealth recommendation: Whole-of-government responses are required to support whole sectors' transition to an economy dominated by disruptive innovations, new industries and new business models.

Part 2 – VicHealth’s action in the arts

VicHealth recognises that participating in the arts has multiple benefits for health and wellbeing: it reduces social isolation, strengthens community connection and builds self-esteem, while also providing opportunities to people to further explore the many nuances of health-related topics..

VicHealth uses the arts to support the delivery of beneficial outcomes across our five strategic imperatives: mental wellbeing, alcohol harm prevention, healthy eating, physical activity and tobacco prevention.

VicHealth’s work in this area is guided by our current [Arts Strategy 2019–2023](#). The strategy outlines the following future priorities:

- Increasing participation and diversity in the arts through the development of strong partnerships between the creative sector and the broader community.
- Supporting creative initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, encourage dialogue around health-related issues and increase health literacy.
- Ensuring that arts and cultural settings are healthy and welcoming environments.

VicHealth invests in the arts through a range of programs and collaborations with local government, arts and community organisations.

Existing VicHealth programs

Everyday Creativity

Regular arts and cultural engagement results in better health outcomes, with some research identifying an optimum of 100+ hours per year. Unfortunately opportunities to engage in arts, cultural and creative experiences are not evenly distributed, with many people in our community facing significant and complex barriers to participation.

Over the next two years we are supporting seven projects across Victoria to develop models and approaches for a more equitable sector where more people can experience more art more often.

More information is available at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/projects-everyday-creativity>

Art of Good Health

The Art of Good Health program aims to generate new ideas that promote health and wellbeing at the local level through the arts. It is designed to enable local councils to bring together arts, cultural and creative sectors with health and community agencies to tackle health promotion challenges.

More information is available at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/the-art-of-good-health>

Indigenous Arts Program

VicHealth recognises the centrality of culture to Aboriginal concepts of health.⁶ In line with our commitment to ‘closing the gap’, we work with a number of organisations to identify opportunities to

⁶ VicHealth 2011, *Life is health is life: Taking action to close the gap*, viewed 21 October 2020, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/life-is-health-is-life>

increase access by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians to contemporary Aboriginal culture. Our Indigenous Arts Program has been running since 2012 with a regular updated roster of projects.

More information is available at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/indigenous-arts-program>

Future directions

VicHealth welcomes opportunities to work with a range of public, private and third sector entities to assist Victorians to achieve and maintain good health and wellbeing. We also welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission or our programs with the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts.

Please contact Cassie Nicholls, Senior Policy Officer, on cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au or 03 9667 1317 should you wish to discuss this further.