Building health through arts and new media

VicHealth action plan 2010–13

August 2010

VicHealth

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The greatest social impacts of the participation in the arts... arise from their ability to help people think critically about and question their experiences and those of others... with all the excitement, danger, magic, colour, symbolism, feeling, metaphor and creativity that the arts offer. It is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies, and through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted.

→ Matarasso 1997[1]

Contents

Message from Peter Batchelor, Minister for the Arts

The Victorian Government is committed to building stronger communities and to providing opportunities for all Victorians to participate in, and have access to, the arts.

Whether we are artists or audience members, the arts bring more than just beauty, stimulation or entertainment into our lives; engagement with the arts can have powerful, meaningful impacts on heath, wellbeing and community strengthening.

VicHealth's 2010-13 Action Plan recognises the transformative power of the arts and aims to harness this over the next three years to encourage communities to use creative outlets to increase social connection, prevent violence against women and reduce race-based discrimination.

The Victorian Government is committed to building stronger communities and to providing opportunities for all Victorians to participate in, and have access to, the arts. By utilising creativity to promote health and community wellbeing, VicHealth will play a role in helping us to achieve this goal.

Congratulations to VicHealth on this Plan and on their unwavering commitment to stimulating broader social and health benefits for all Victorians.

Peter Batchelor MP
Minister for the Arts

Message from Todd Harper, CEO, VicHealth

How much you earn, your social position, your level of education or your capacity to be involved in activities that help connect you to others in your community are important factors in determining your health and wellbeing. Social disadvantage, material deprivation, and poor living and working conditions are clearly linked to poor health. Likewise, tobacco use, alcohol use, lack of physical activity and an unhealthy diet also contribute to ill health. Consequently, to promote health in our population we need improvements to social, economic, cultural and physical environments in addition to developing skills and knowledge for individuals and the community. The role of the arts and new media in contributing to improving these conditions is clear.

Most Australians are aware of the benefits that the arts can have to individual health and wellbeing.[1] Both as creators and consumers of art we know that arts participation encourages individual skill development and social connections between people and groups. Through arts engagement, people can expand their social networks and develop new friendships, which can provide social support, avert social isolation and improve their mental health and wellbeing.[2]

Diversity in a community can be a powerful source of cultural vibrancy and community wellbeing. The arts influence social norms through development of activity that facilitates meaningful contact for people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through this process ignorance pertaining to cultural diversity and discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are reduced.[3]

The role of the arts in exploring and communicating about contemporary societal concerns, giving voice to hidden issues and allowing self-expression is also a major contributor to health. Through the advocacy of artists, communities can be made aware of significant social issues impacting on health and can be mobilised to action.

More recently, technology/new media was identified as a critical new sector for health promotion activity. With more than 8.4 million internet subscribers,[4] 22.1 million mobile phone subscribers[5] and with nearly half of all Australians having a social networking profile,[6] technology is not only a vehicle of creative expression but also a key tool for encouraging arts engagement. Across Australia, 77% of Australians use the internet, with one in three using the internet for arts creation or consumption purposes.[7]

VicHealth's association with, and support for, the arts began in 1987. Since this time, significant and enduring partnerships with arts organisations have been established. From support of large companies through to smaller community-based organisations there has been opportunity to develop and document new approaches to promoting health and community wellbeing through arts activity.

In 2009, VicHealth developed a new strategic plan that identifies our role and focus during 2010–13. Increasing social connection, preventing violence against women and reducing race-based discrimination are central to this plan. Understanding more about the health benefits of participating in the arts and the role of the arts and new media in shaping social norms and attitudes is our key focus over the next three years.

Evaluation and measurement are also important components of the VicHealth plan. Excellence is as critical to art as good evidence is to public health interventions. There are many opportunities for research into the arts generally, and community-based arts work specifically that will help us understand how best to maximise the wider social and health benefits of arts participation. To do this VicHealth will continue to work with arts organisations to build their capacity to implement rigorous research and evaluation activity which documents the contribution made by the arts to our health, social, economic and cultural landscape.

This activity plan outlines the:

- role of VicHealth
- current policy environment in which we operate
- framework which will inform our work with the arts and new media sectors
- activities that will be undertaken with the arts and new media sectors over the next three years.

Victoria is a world leader in utilising creative activity as a means to promote health and community wellbeing. Over the next three years our work in partnerships with arts organisations will continue to inform national and international developments.

Todd Harper
Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth

On the one hand, millions of dollars are committed to alleviating ill health through individual intervention. Meanwhile we ignore what our everyday experience tells us, i.e. the way we organise our society, the extent to which we encourage interaction among the citizenry and the degree to which we trust and associate with each other in caring communities is probably one of the most important determinants of health.

→ Lomas 1998[8]

The role of VicHealth and the arts and new media in promoting health: a partnership approach

Figure 1:
VicHealth's work with the arts and new media: a supporting framework

Priorities for focus with arts and new media

Health inequalities

- Improve the physical and mental health of those experiencing social, economic or geographic disadvantage
- Contribute to closing the health gap between Indigenous* and non-Indigenous Victorians.

Participation

- Increase opportunities for social connection
- Reduce race-based discrimination and promote diversity
- Increase participation in physical activity through the arts
- Prevent violence against women through promotion of respectful relationships.

Nutrition, tobacco, alcohol and UV

- Improve nutrition
- Reduce tobacco use
- Reduce harm from alcohol
- Reduce harmful UV exposure.

Our approach

To develop and implement innovative ways to promote health through partnering, advocacy and capacity building within the arts sector.

Health promotion actions

- Facilitate **arts participation and skill development for community members**
- **Develop arts organisations and environments** that foster good health
- **Build the arts and new media sectors' workforce capacity** to plan, implement and evaluate health promotion activity
- Support the arts sector to **develop systems** that support and sustain health
- Support the role of the arts and new media in **strengthening communities**
- Use the arts and new media as vehicles with which to **communicate** about priority health issues
- Create and use knowledge acquired through **research and evaluation** with the arts and new media sectors
- Contribute to and advocate for healthy arts **policy and regulation**.

Priority populations

In addition to whole-of-population approaches, VicHealth will work with the arts and new media sectors to focus efforts on those in our community who experience the greatest disadvantage.

Outcomes

Individual level

- Increased involvement in community and group activities
- Increased skill development for participants
- Increased social connection for participants
- Increased political and civic engagement
- Increased healthy eating
- Reduced levels of smoking and alcohol consumption.

Organisational level

Arts organisations and environments that are:

- accessible, inclusive and equitable
- safe and supportive
- working in partnerships across sectors
- implementing evidence-informed approaches in their work
- sustaining responsible alcohol and food management policies and diminish reliance on alcohol and unhealthy food sponsorship.

Community level

Communities that:

- are cohesive
- value civic engagement
- promote community responsibility
- are aware of health issues and community concerns
- understand the role of the arts and new media in health.

* Throughout this document the term 'Indigenous' refers to people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

The role of VicHealth and the arts and new media in promoting health: a partnership approach

The arts and new media: contributing to the development of healthy communities and individuals

With over 16 million Australians actively engaged in the arts, the arts sector has enormous reach and significance in our community. Research from the Australia Council indicates that nine out of 10 people think the arts should be an important part of the education of every Australian and more people are seeing the arts as accessible with a decline in the numbers who believe the arts are too expensive and/or elitist.[9]

Participating for health

The health benefits of arts participation are well documented. Through reducing social isolation and increasing social and community connections, arts participation improves mental health by decreasing stress, anxiety and depression. Arts participation also improves self-esteem, supports skill development and has been proven to increase educational attainment of young participants.[10]

The key form of engagement in the arts by people surveyed in the Australia Council's *More than bums on seats* study was "receptive engagement" or consumption (53%); with 39% participating both creatively and amenably. Literature was the most popular art form (84%), followed by music (62%), visual arts and crafts (49%) and theatre and dance (42%).

The Australia Council's survey also found that Australians more readily associated the arts with individual benefits (such as a form of expression, inspiration and personal growth) than community benefits (such as understanding others and feeling a part of the community).[11] However, the social benefits appear to be assumed as many people attended the arts primarily as a means to connect with others, rather than for the art form itself.

VicHealth's continuing partnership with arts and new media organisations is based on our mutual interests of increasing participation and creativity across all levels of our community.

The role of participation in new media is also starting to be understood. Contrary to popular views that warn of the negative impacts of participation in information technology and new media, it is clear that people do derive health benefits through this participation. As a new form of communication, participation in new media reduces social isolation, particularly for those residing in geographically isolated areas or those with varying levels of ability. The medium is also increasingly being used to communicate about issues of community concern and encourages

civic engagement in important issues. Through this engagement young people learn new skills and have the opportunity to make contributions to community life.

While the health benefits of arts participation are accepted and the benefits of participation in new media are starting to be documented, we know that people from households with lower levels of income participate less in arts and new media activity and that there are also differing participation rates associated with gender, ethnicity and geographic location.[12] VicHealth's continuing partnership with arts and new media organisations is based on our mutual interests of increasing participation and creativity across all levels of our community.

Building healthy communities

The arts sector makes contributions not only to individual health but also to community health and wellbeing. Studies of the arts and their impact show improvements in relation to the social factors which effect health; for example, cultural celebrations and events can promote community cooperation, bring new skills to community members, promote awareness of community issues, develop talents in a community, reduce community isolation and promote economic development.[13]

Table 1:
Levels of creative and receptive participation in the arts

Art form	Creative participation %	Receptive participation %	Total participation %
Visual arts and crafts	22	38	49
Theatre and dance	7	40	42
Creative writing/reading	16	84	84
Music	15	57	62

Source: Australia Council for the Arts 2010
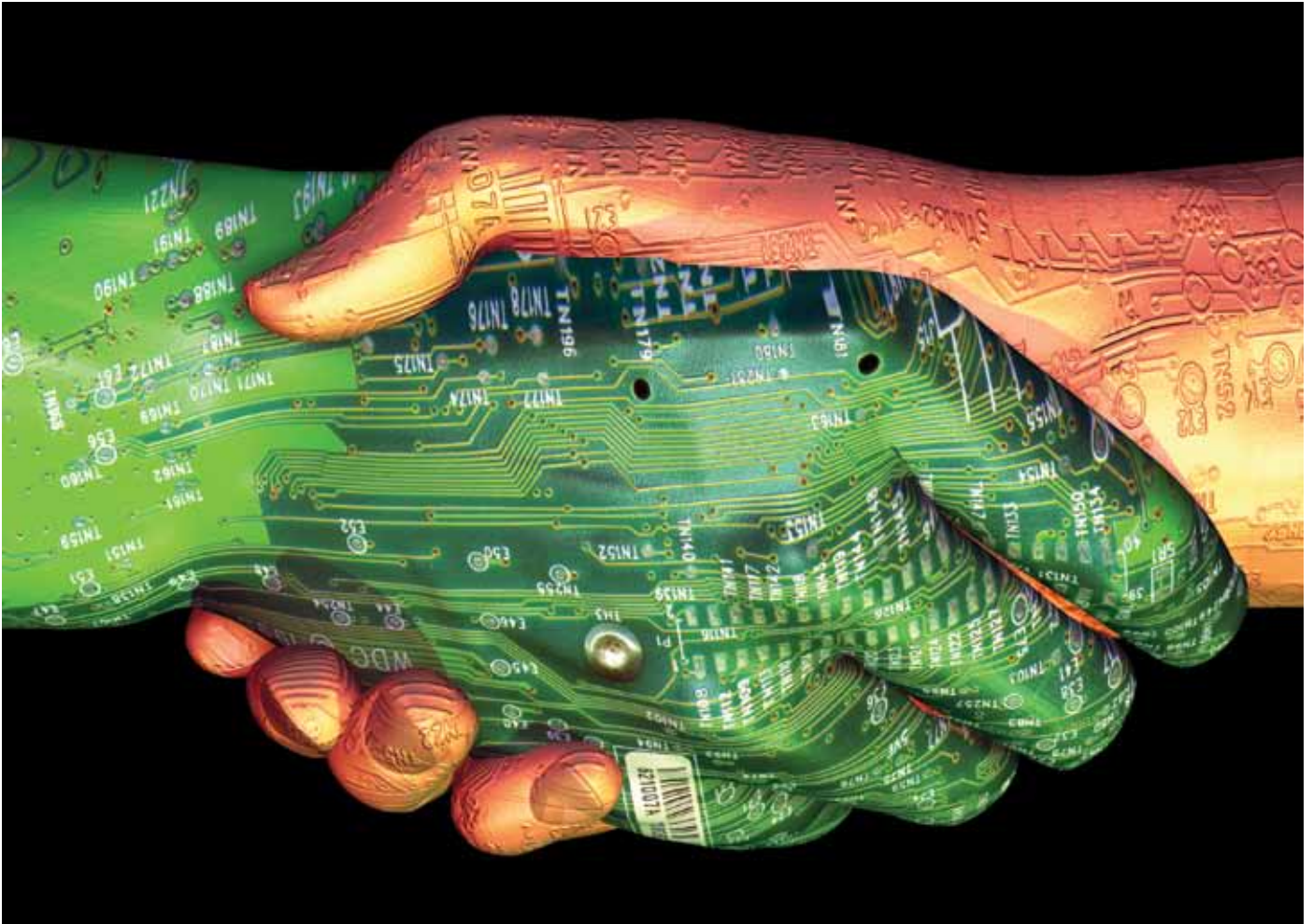
In addition, VicHealth's research demonstrates that arts activity can facilitate meaningful contact for people from diverse cultural backgrounds and in doing so reduce ignorance pertaining to cultural diversity and ensuing discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

If constructed appropriately, participation in arts projects provides a vehicle for this contact.[14] This is further supported by the Australia Council's research which indicates that there is increasing acknowledgement that the arts help us to understand others whose lives are different to ours (86% agreement).[15] By reducing social isolation, improving social connection and addressing discrimination in all of its forms, communities benefit.

Communicating for health

The role of the arts and new media in examining contemporary community issues and concerns is also well documented. The arts and new media can reflect on issues impacting on health, such as discrimination and violence, and can make significant contributions in forming attitudes and behaviours which instil acceptance of respect, diversity and acknowledgement of the social, economic and health benefits of a diverse society.

In summary, the arts and new media have the capacity to build health in our community by:

- expressing and articulating complex social issues to the broader community

- enhancing the skill of participants and influencing an individual's development and identity

- providing opportunities for expression for the most excluded people and communities

- advocating on issues such as discrimination, exclusion, homelessness and violence

- promoting diversity and cross-cultural understanding

- increasing participant self-esteem and self-confidence

- building social inclusion and social connectedness.[16]

The role of VicHealth and the arts and new media in promoting health: a partnership approach

VicHealth: contributing to the development of healthy communities and individuals

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) was established by the Victorian Parliament under the *Tobacco Act 1987* with a mandate to promote good health for all Victorians. VicHealth is an independent, statutory authority with a Board of Governance that is responsible to the Minister for Health. The objectives of VicHealth as mandated by the *Tobacco Act 1987* are:

- to fund activity related to the promotion of good health, safety or the prevention of disease
- to increase awareness of programs for promoting good health in the community through the sponsorship of sports, the arts and popular culture
- to encourage healthy lifestyles in the community and support activities involving participation in healthy pursuits
- to fund research and development activities in support of these activities.

Our health promotion investments target the greatest preventable risk factors for ill health: smoking; poor nutrition; harmful use of alcohol; lack of physical activity; social and economic exclusion; and the effects of UV exposure. While working to improve the health of all Victorians, we also focus on the needs of those with the poorest health by targeting many of our activities on health inequalities.

With over 20 years experience, VicHealth has a track record in drawing diverse groups together to influence individuals' health-related lifestyles and to improve the social, economic, cultural and physical environments required to sustain health.

Our vision

VicHealth envisages a community where:

- health is a fundamental human right
- everyone shares in the responsibility for promoting health
- everyone benefits from improved health outcomes.

Our mission

Our mission is to build the capabilities of organisations, communities and individuals in ways that:

- change social, economic, cultural and physical environments to improve health for all Victorians
- strengthen the understanding and skills of individuals in ways that support their efforts to achieve and maintain health.

Our values

- Brave
- Just
- Creative.

Our focus

VicHealth's focus is on health promotion and primary prevention of non-communicable diseases.

VicHealth's focus				
Promotion	*Prevention*	*Early intervention*	*Treatment*	*Rehabilitation*
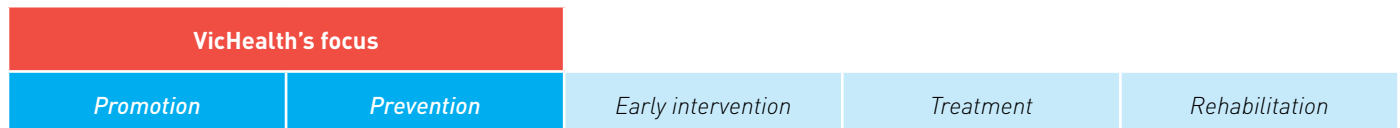
Primary prevention addresses the causes of poor health to prevent problems from developing in the first place. It can focus on individual risk factors and behaviours or broader social, economic and environmental contributors to disease. Addressing the broader contributors is often referred to as 'health promotion'.

Health promotion does more than merely prevent poor health. It also increases the prospect of achieving optimal health. This is vital to meet both the productivity requirements of our economy as well as to realise widely shared aspirations for a just and sustainable society.

With over 20 years experience, VicHealth has a track record in drawing diverse groups together to influence individuals' health-related lifestyles and to improve the social, economic, cultural and physical environments required to sustain health. We highlight what can be achieved by integrating funding activities, research and rigorous evaluation. We also build opportunities for people to be informed, learn new skills, have greater access to activities that promote good health, and share healthier environments.

This role allows us to lead and advocate for excellence in the development of appropriate health promoting policies and programs, as well as maintain strategic alliances with national and global public health interests to strengthen health promotion action and advocacy.

The (Aussie Rules) Taming of the Shrew, the Old Van Theatre Company (funded by VicHealth) – Nangiloc, north-west Victoria
Photographer: Julian Bowron

The role of VicHealth and the arts and new media in promoting health: a partnership approach

Adding value to the arts and new media sectors: a partnership approach

In addition to supporting activity designed to address a range of health issues, VicHealth will also continue to work with arts and new media to build stronger sectors that are able to address contemporary community concerns and lead innovation to promote health.

1. Supporting framework

The work supported by VicHealth over the next three years will be underpinned by an evidence-based framework (see Figure 1) that identifies:

- health issues under focus
- actions required to address these health issues
- priority populations for focus
- mutually desired outcomes that will underpin evaluation and monitoring of activity.

2. Maximising policy relevance

VicHealth continues to align itself strategically with international, national and state policy health initiatives.

Internationally, the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health identifies the following areas of immediate focus:

- improve daily living conditions
- tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources
- measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action.

At the national level:

- *National Health Priority Areas initiative* identifies the following chronic diseases requiring special attention:[17] reducing cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, asthma, injury and mental health problems including stress, anxiety and depression

- *Cultural Ministers Council's National Arts and Disability Strategy* (2009) provides a framework to support, encourage and promote access and participation in the arts by people with a disability
- *National Education and the Arts Statement* (2005) jointly released by the Cultural Ministers Council and the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs sets down a vision for the future of education and the arts in Australia.

Over the next three years, VicHealth will advocate for inclusion of arts and new media activity in relevant policies and programs.

The Victorian Government has also developed several state-level strategies targeting specific areas:

- *Creative Capacity Plus: Arts Victoria*: developing a culture of participation through the arts
- *Arts Victoria's Access All Areas: Disability Action Planning in the Arts (2009–2013)*: improving access and equity so that all Victorians can participate fully in arts and cultural activities
- *A Fairer Victoria (2006–2010)*: addressing social disadvantage
- *All of Us: Victoria's multicultural policy (2009)*: strengthening and promoting multiculturalism
- *Because Mental Health Matters: State Mental Health Strategy (2009–2019)*: focusing on social inclusion as a driver of mental health reform
- *Department of Human Services: Health Promotion Priorities (2007–2012)*: to improve overall health and reduce health inequalities

- *Preventing Violence Against Women: A state 10-year plan (2010–2020)*: includes focus on the arts
- *Action Plan 2010 : Strengthening Community Organisations*: strengthening communities
- *Indigenous Health Promotion, Social Inclusion and Cultural Heritage Frameworks* (in development under the Department of Health and the Department of Planning and Community Development): acknowledges arts and cultural heritage as a key Indigenous health platform
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)*: ensures basic human rights including economic, social and cultural rights. These include rights to basic living standards, such as access to food, housing, social security, education and health.

It is clear that these initiatives frame and influence the role of the arts and new media and provide increasing opportunity for the arts and new media organisations to make contributions in a range of policy arenas. Over the next three years, VicHealth will advocate for inclusion of arts and new media activity in relevant policies and programs.

3. Developing strategic partnerships

VicHealth invests in partnerships with researchers, policy makers, the government and non-government sectors, private industry and philanthropic organisations to facilitate sustainable advocacy, policy and structural change which maximises health outcomes. Over the next three years we will support arts and new media organisations to develop partnerships which benefit our mutual goals.

4. Consolidating the evidence base to strengthen art practice and positioning

Central to VicHealth activity is a focus on innovation and evaluation. We apply learning to produce change by working closely with our partners through evaluation practice. This work will be consolidated over the next three years in order to ensure that a strong evidence base is created regarding the role of arts and new media in promoting health.

5. Communication with and about art and new media

VicHealth recognises the importance of effective marketing and communication in improving health. We focus our activity on raising awareness, understanding and support for our strategic priority areas including our work with arts and new media organisations. Over the next three years we will communicate with our arts and new media stakeholders and partner with them to develop communication strategies which promote health and make visible the work being undertaken by them. We will also provide information and support to enable arts and new media organisations to contribute to increasing awareness of our strategic priority areas.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Promote and use of a range of evaluation techniques targeted at the needs of organisations undertaking arts and new media activity.
	Consolidate partnerships with academic institutions to support evaluation capacity development focusing on arts and new media as vehicles to promote health.
	Support research and synthesise and disseminate knowledge to arts and new media stakeholders on effective arts and new media practices and assist them in the implementation of evidence-based activity across strategic priority areas.
Organisational development	Support development of healthy arts organisations that are welcoming and accessible to all community members.
	Consolidate partnerships between arts, community and other sector organisations to strengthen practice and resources.
	Provide media support, advice and training to our arts and new media partners and funded projects to support communication regarding program objectives and outcomes.
	Provide opportunity for arts and new media organisations to develop skills in promoting health.
Systems development	Support linkage activities between government, community, academic and arts and new media stakeholders to foster comprehensive program development and evaluation activities.
Communication	Form partnerships with a range of funding bodies in order to build a strong sector base for health promotion activity.
	Use our strategic communication channels to translate and disseminate the results of arts and new media activity.
	Facilitate an ongoing events program including arts and new media focused seminars, conferences and forums.
Contribute to policy and regulation	Use evaluation outcomes to inform contributions to policy, as it relates to the arts and new media activity.
	Develop policy submissions to support arts and new media development and growth.
	Advocate for inclusion of arts and new media activity in relevant government policies and programs.

Action in priority health areas

Addressing health inequalities

What we know

Improving the health of those experiencing social, economic or geographic disadvantage

People from low income households are more likely to: report their general health as poor; experience depression, have days off work due to ill health, report greater levels of physical impairment; and have greater difficulty accessing affordable health care.[19]

People from households with lower levels of income participated less in community events.[20] Affordability is a key factor in people's capacity for social participation with nearly 16% of Australian households not being able to afford to participate in social activities such as family holidays, having a night out or having family or friends over for a meal.[21]

Young people who are socially and economically marginalised utilise ICT (information and communication technology), as there is an ability to accommodate for cultural and other differences through their own networking profiles.[22]

Participation in creative activity is integral to Indigenous culture and heritage.

With the prevalence of mental health problems highest among young people who are socially and economically marginalised, the positive interactive aspects of ICT allow for greater participation in online activities that have the potential to influence the health, economic and social outcomes of young people.[23]

Closing the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians

The land that is Victoria has an Indigenous history that goes back many thousands of years. It is estimated that there were between 20,000 and 60,000 people speaking more than 30 languages when European settlers first arrived. In 2006, there were 33,000 Indigenous people aged 15 years and over who lived in Victoria. More than half of Indigenous Victorians are aged below 25 years, and more than a third are aged below 15 years.[24]

The life expectancy of Indigenous people is significantly lower than that of all non-Indigenous Australians.[25] Aboriginal young people are four times more likely to die before the age of 25.[26] In Victoria, the 2007

Angels' Voices Extravaganza Concert, Emerge Cultural Hubs project, Multicultural Arts Victoria – Shepparton, November 2009
Photographer: Damian Vincenzi

Indigenous perinatal mortality rate was 20.4 per 1,000 births compared with the non-Indigenous rate of 9.8 per 1,000 births.

Participation in creative activity is integral to Indigenous culture and heritage. In 2006, over one quarter (27%) of Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over living in Victoria had participated in at least one Indigenous creative art activity. The most popular activities were art and craft activities (14%) and writing or telling stories (11%), whilst 9% had participated in music, dance or theatre.

Nearly half (47%) of Indigenous people in non-remote areas of Victoria had attended movies, theatres or concerts in the previous three months, and 37% had visited a library, museum or art gallery.[27]

Of the 8,555 employed Indigenous people in Victoria in 2006, 3.5% were employed in a cultural occupation.[28]

Our role

VicHealth focuses on improving the physical and mental health of those experiencing social, economic or geographic disadvantage. Over the past 10 years we have developed strong and effective partnerships with Indigenous organisations working to enhance the health, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous Victorians.

Over the next three years we will continue to work with arts and new media sectors to identify ways of tackling health inequalities. We will also focus on supporting Indigenous communities to communicate their stories and celebrate their success through the arts medium.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Research and document models of good arts sector and new media practice designed to address the health of specific populations, including Indigenous and new arrival communities, those with a disability and those experiencing disadvantage due to social, economic or geographic circumstances.
Participation and skill development	Support a small number of projects designed to increase arts participation for particular groups. Projects include: • facilitated by the **State Library of Victoria, the Book Well program**, through 'read aloud' reading groups, uses literature to improve health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, in particular disadvantaged and socially isolated people. • **Choir of Hope and Inspiration's Rural Touring and Education program** engages people from disadvantaged backgrounds in singing whilst communicating about their experiences and advocating for community and organisational support to address issues impacting on their lives. • **Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation's Cultural Strengthening and Exchange through Art** delivers an Aboriginal dance and music program to Year 9 students in school settings. The project explores issues relating to cultural diversity, social connection and brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. • **University of Melbourne Faculty for the VCA and Music's Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Theatre for Change project**, designed to increase social cohesion through community participation in creative activity which enables refugee participants to articulate issues of settlement, inter-cultural experience and cultural identity. • **Multicultural Arts Victoria's Emerge Cultural Hubs project**, designed to provide mentoring for Indigenous and new arrival artists residing in regional areas.
Organisational development	Refine and support implementation of arts sector standards designed to assist arts organisations to increase access to participation for all community members.
Contribute to policy and regulation	Advocate for inclusion of arts activity designed to increase arts participation for people with varying levels of ability and those experiencing disadvantage due to their social, economic or cultural backgrounds.

Action in priority health areas

Increasing participation in physical activity through the arts

What we know

Physical inactivity has been estimated to account for 6.6% of the burden of disease and injury in Australia and rates second only to tobacco smoking.[29] It accounts for 22% of heart disease, 11% of stroke, 14% of diabetes and 10% of breast cancer.

Over the next three years, we will support arts activity designed to expand opportunities for physical activity.

Participation in physical activity contributes to:

- mental health benefits resulting from the immediate physiological changes occurring during physical activity[30]

- improvements in self-esteem and self-efficacy, mastery and control, problem solving and academic performance, and is valued by many young people as an intrinsically enjoyable pursuit[31]

- mental health and wellbeing by strengthening relationships and links with one another, building active cohesive communities and enhancing access to safe and supportive environments

- linking young people and their families with schools, community facilities and networks.[32]

Increases in physical activity rates across the whole population require creating multiple opportunities ranging from less organised (active living and active transport) through to more organised activities (active recreation and active sport). The benefits of physically-based arts activities for health are obvious for all age and cultural groups.

Share the Spirit Festival 2010, Songlines' Cultural Strengthening and Exchange through Art project (funded by VicHealth) – Treasury Gardens, Melbourne
Photographer: James Henry

Our role

From its inception, VicHealth has played a significant role in supporting organisations to promote and encourage increased physical activity. While our emphasis has been in the sport sector, the arts sector also contributes to physical activity participation levels.

Over the next three years, we will support arts activity designed to expand opportunities for physical activity. This includes arts-based activity that by its nature involves or is physical, such as dance, circus and physical theatre. Also included are creative physical arts projects which are generated by mediums such as technology and engage large groups of people. We will explore the social and economic barriers to participation in these activities and how to best overcome them.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Evaluate and document arts-based activity designed to increase participation in physical activity.
Participation and skill development	Support up to 10 organisations to develop and implement arts-based activity designed to increase participation in physical activity.
Contribute to policy and regulation	Advocate for inclusion of arts activity designed to increase physical activity participation in relevant state policy documents and programs.

There is something magical that happens when communities rise to explain the nature of what they are, when together they make something happen, when they use arts tools to tell their story and define a vision of what they want to be ... And through community arts, we can forge new Australian narratives about ourselves and explore new ideas – and new relations – around individuals and communities.

→ Kathy Keele, CEO Australia Council for the Arts
Excellence in Civic Engagement
Opening Address, ReGenerating Community Conference
Melbourne 2 September 2009

Action in priority health areas

Increasing opportunities for social connection

What we know

Social connections may comprise of friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances and immediate and extended community. Each contributes to physical and mental health in a variety of ways.

People who are socially isolated or excluded are more likely to have poorer health,[34] experience depressive symptoms, and have lower self-esteem.[35] Communities with high levels of social cohesion, including participation by individuals in community organisations and activities, have better health than those with low levels.[36]

Technology is not only a vehicle of creative expression but also a key tool for encouraging arts engagement...

Digital technologies have become an increasingly pervasive and transformative part of our everyday lives. The internet and mobile technologies are at the centre of this transformation. There are more than 8.4 million internet subscribers,[37]

22.1 million mobile phone subscribers[38] and nearly half of all Australians have a social networking profile.[39] Technology is not only a vehicle of creative expression but also a key tool for encouraging arts engagement, with 77% or one in three Australians using the internet for arts creation or consumption purposes.[40]

Digital access can provide social benefits such as a greater sense of empowerment and equity of access by recipient communities, increased computer literacy and greater interaction between people (for example, in public housing estates).

Choir of Hope and Inspiration, Awakenings Festival (funded by VicHealth) – Horsham, October 2009
Photographer: Melissa Powell Photography

Our role

For many years VicHealth has partnered with arts organisations to increase participation in arts activities and to break down social isolation and build social connectedness. Both VicHealth and our partners understand the value of creative engagement in assisting people to develop supportive social networks and feelings of wellbeing.

Over the next three years we will continue to create opportunities for participation and access in the arts and promote healthy environments in which arts activity takes place. New media has been identified as a critical new sector for health promotion activity. Our priority will be to plan, implement and evaluate activity in the arts and new media to better understand the links between social connection and health in these sectors.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Conduct evidence reviews and develop and disseminate research summaries focusing on: 1. the links between social connection and health and the role of arts in increasing social connection 2. the role of technology and new media in social connection. Support a research practice leader to evaluate and document the outcomes of the **Localities Enhancing Arts Participation (LEAP) program designed to increase arts participation in the cities of Casey, Mildura and the Ballarat area**. Research and document the health improvements achieved through the LEAP project. Evaluate and document the practice of 14 projects supported through the **Technology, Arts and Social Connection (TASC) program**. Disseminate the findings of research exploring the impact of technology on young people's social relationships.
Community development	Contribute to the Victorian Fire Recovery effort through support for local community initiatives.
Organisational support	Refine and support implementation of arts sector standards designed to assist arts organisations in increasing access to participation for all community members. Provide skills training across sectors in practices designed to increase social participation and connection through the arts and new media. Support mentors to work with funded projects in order to enhance collaboration across organisations and maximise practice outcomes.
Participation and skill development	Implement the TASC program which will support 14 organisations in trialling new media strategies to increase social connection for young people. Support a small number of organisations funded through the TASC program to increase the size and scope of new media activity which has indicated promising results in enhancing social connection for young people.
Contribute to policy and regulation	Advocate for inclusion of arts-based strategies designed to increase social connection in relevant state and national policies and programs.

Action in priority health areas

Reducing race-based discrimination and promoting diversity

What we know

In Australia, 47% of people born in non-English speaking countries report having experienced discrimination (compared with 20% of Australian-born) and 14% report experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months (compared with 7% of Australian-born).[41]

Discrimination is among a number of factors contributing to inequality and disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Victorians and some migrant and refugee communities.[42] People from Indigenous, African, Middle-Eastern, Muslim and Asian backgrounds are most effected by discrimination and intolerance.[43]

Effective access to and participation in cultural activities for all is an essential dimension of promoting an inclusive society.

Effective access to and participation in cultural activities for all is an essential dimension of promoting an inclusive society. Furthermore, participation in cultural activities can also be instrumental in helping people and communities overcome poverty and social exclusion.[44]

A member of the Afrabats enjoys his moment on the cloud swing, Westside Circus' Community Program
Photographer: Westside Circus

Supporting diversity and reducing discrimination in our community are important for:

• increasing productivity and innovation

• reducing the economic costs associated with discrimination and resulting disadvantage

• building social cohesion and social inclusion

• protecting human rights

• reducing the gap in health, social and economic status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians.

Our role

Since its inception VicHealth has supported arts activity designed to engage people from diverse cultural backgrounds in arts activity including community festivals. In addition to maintaining focus on arts participation, in 2009 VicHealth commenced a collaborative partnership with the arts sector to encourage dialogue about the harmful impacts of race-based discrimination and the benefits of diversity.

Over the next three years, VicHealth in partnership with the arts and new media sectors, will address community attitudes and beliefs that may lead to unfair treatment of people on the basis of race, culture, ethnicity or religion, undermine acceptance of diversity or contribute to tensions and misunderstanding between groups.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Evaluate the effectiveness of the **Arts About Us program** in increasing awareness of issues relevant to race-based discrimination and cultural diversity.
Communication	Implement the **Arts About Us program**, designed to support 16 arts organisations and venues in communicating the impacts of race-based discrimination and the positive aspects of cultural diversity. Develop arts-based communication materials and strategies designed to promote cultural diversity and address discrimination.
Organisational support	Provide skills training in the arts sector in practices designed to reduce discrimination and promote diversity.
Contribute to policy and regulation	Advocate for inclusion of arts-based strategies designed to address discrimination in relevant state and national policies and programs.

Art bridges the silos that separate us as we confront today's pressing issues. Art creates new visions and engagement, connecting the head and the heart.

→ Judith Marcuse
Founder and Co-Director,
International Centre of Art for Social Change[45]

Action in priority health areas

Preventing violence against women and promoting respectful relationships

What we know

From the age of 15, 33% of women have experienced inappropriate comments about their body or sex life, 25% have experienced inappropriate sexual touching, and one in five (19%) have been stalked.[46]

One in three women in Australia who have ever had a boyfriend or husband report experiencing at least one form of violence during their lifetime from an intimate male partner.

Intimate partner violence is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years, with depression and anxiety being the majority of the health burden imposed.

Arts, culture and new media play an instrumental role in addressing violence against women

Arts, culture and new media play an instrumental role in addressing violence against women through their capacity to influence social norms and attitudes, and create environments which foster development of respectful relationships and equal participation.[47]

Research assessing the impact of the Soul City Television Drama series in South Africa, focusing on violence against women found that viewers reported a decrease in their acceptance of intimate partner violence and an increase in the belief that communities can play a role in preventing this violence.[48]

A group of Women's Circus members training and rehearsing for a performance in 'Here', Drill Hall, West Footscray 2009
Photographer: Ursula Dutkiewicz

Our role

VicHealth works with academic institutions, the government and the non-government sector to develop policies and programs designed to prevent violence against women. Through this work we have been acknowledged as making a global contribution to increasing the knowledge about the health impacts of violence against women and models of good practice in preventing this violence. Over the next three years we will continue to support arts organisations to create safe and inclusive environments for women and communicate about the impacts of this violence on our communities.

Action	Our planned activities
Research and evaluation	Support research to identify arts sector programs which foster respectful behaviours, policies and environments that are inclusive and safe for women and girls.
Direct participation	Support arts organisations to increase participation for those who have experienced violence in order to improve the confidence and self-esteem of participants whilst also communicating the impact of their experience to the broader community.
Organisational support	In conjunction with our partners, support a **visiting fellowship to Australia for Dr Garth Japhet**, the former director of the South African Soul City Television Drama series focusing on violence against women. Through this fellowship, forums will be provided to explore this work and the potential for replication in the Australian context.

We can estimate how much we save in the prison and juvenile centres and courts but like sunlight through an open window we can't physically capture or bottle the creative journey. Theatre, art, music is all about heart and soul journeys, about arrivals at places that can only be navigated by heart and soul. It is all about understanding what it is to be human and those points of connectedness that surpass race, creed, money, power.

→ Maud Clark, Artistic Director, Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company, 2007[49]

Action in priority health areas

Reducing tobacco and alcohol consumption and promoting healthy food choices

What we know

In 21 years the smoking rate of Victorian adults has dropped from 34% to 17%.[50] Though much progress has been made, smoking remains the leading preventable cause of many cancers, respiratory, cardiovascular and other diseases.

In Victoria, smoking costs approximately 4000 lives and $5 billion every year.[51] Smoking rates remain disproportionately high in many of our communities, causing avoidable hardship and ill health among many of the people who can least afford it.[52]

Alcohol remains the most widely used drug in Victoria with nearly half of Victorians over the age of 14 being daily or weekly drinkers.[53]

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of many cancers, respiratory, cardiovascular and other diseases.

While the majority of Victorian drinkers consume alcohol in moderation, 33% of all Victorian adults (aged 18 or over) drink at risky or high-risk levels for short-term harm at least yearly.[54] This figure is substantially higher among 18–24 year olds with 18% undertaking risky drinking at least weekly, 44% at least monthly and 64% at least yearly.[55]

Alcohol promotion occurs throughout the arts, for example via sponsorship at arts events. The arts setting offers great opportunity to promote sensible alcohol consumption and healthy food choices. This is particularly important as inadequate vegetable and fruit intake is responsible for 30% of coronary heart disease, 20% of gastrointestinal cancer and 14% of stroke.[56]

Share the Spirit Festival 2010, Songlines' Cultural Strengthening and Exchange through Art project (funded by VicHealth) – Treasury Gardens, Melbourne Photographer: James Henry

Our role

Controlling tobacco consumption and promoting healthy eating are two areas that VicHealth has invested in since its establishment. The buy-out of tobacco sponsorship in sports and arts events was a world-first and cemented a 22-year relationship between VicHealth and the arts sector. In this time substantial investments were made in arts organisations to create environments that supported healthy choices, such as smoke-free policies and healthy food choices and messages at events. Over the next three years VicHealth will continue this work with additional focus on supporting arts organisations to facilitate responsible drinking practices at venues and events.

Action	Our planned activities
Organisational support	Develop and disseminate tools and resources, including standards guidelines, to support arts organisations in regulating tobacco consumption, sustaining responsible alcohol management and healthy food policies.
Systems development	Advocate for adoption of the **healthy arts organisation** standards at the state and national level.

Technologies and the invigorated will of the public to participate, shape and personalise have changed the nature of cultural engagement.

→ Jones 2009[57]

"The arts are not somehow apart from national life, the arts are at the heart of national life… In times of war and sacrifice, the arts – and artists – remind us to sing and to laugh and to live. In times of plenty, they challenge our conscience and implore us to remember the least among us. In moments of division or doubt, they compel us to see the common values that we share; the ideals to which we aspire, even if we sometimes fall short. In days of hardship, they renew our hope that brighter days are still ahead."

→ US President, Barack Obama,
Reception for Kennedy Center Honorees
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC
6 December 2009

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Julian Martin
Not titled (four brown objects on khaki) 2010
pastel on paper
76 x 55cm
Represented by Arts Project Australia

VicHealth

State Government
Victoria