

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472867

Public

Organisation

Psychology of the Performing Arts and Entertainment Industry Interest Group of the Australian Psychological Society



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The Psychology of the Performing Arts and Entertainment Industry Interest Group of the Australian Psychological Society represents a dedicated network of psychologists working with creative practitioners across the performing arts sector. Since 2020, we have met regularly for peer supervision and professional development focused on the unique mental health and occupational challenges faced by the industry. Through our clinical work, we have gained direct insight into the human cost of a sector that produces world-class artistic excellence while operating within conditions of emotional labour, psychosocial strain, physical risk, and financial insecurity.

We frequently encounter artists only after years of cumulative harm. Across our practices, we support arts workers experiencing chronic stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, substance misuse, suicidality, complex trauma, and permanent physical injury. While research remains limited, available evidence suggests creative industries are among the most psychologically vulnerable occupational sectors. Workers face precarious employment, blurred boundaries, long/irregular hours, public scrutiny, exposure to trauma, and intense interpersonal dynamics. Due to stigma, fear of professional repercussions, and confidentiality concerns, many suffer silently or delay seeking help until they are in distress. Suggested reforms below:

Education: Creative students experience disproportionately high rates of physical and psychological injury, yet education around sustainable practice, burnout prevention, psychosocial safety, and healthy workplace behaviour remains inconsistent. Tertiary training should include evidence-based education on safe work practices, sustainable creative processes, and collective responsibility for safe workplaces. This should be supported by a coordinated national body focused specifically on performer wellbeing that can bridge education, industry, research, and policy implementation.

Psychosocial safety: While many organisations have wellbeing policies, these are often poorly translated into daily practice. Artists continue to report bullying, harassment, unsafe power dynamics, emotional exploitation, and inadequate support following traumatic productions or workplace incidents. Funding should support industry-specific wellbeing coordinators, specialist employee assistance programs, and trauma-informed supports.

Long-term sustainability: Excessive work hours, chronic financial insecurity, and the absence of reasonable industry standards contribute to burnout and workforce attrition. Increasingly, experienced artists are leaving the sector because sustaining a viable life has become impossible. Younger performers are presenting with profound hopelessness about their futures, particularly in sectors where artist development pathways have diminished. Without coordinated investment in artist development and career sustainability, we risk losing both artistic expertise and cultural identity.

Specialised healthcare pathways: Just as elite athletes are supported by clinicians trained in the demands of sport, arts workers require health professionals who understand their unique pressures. Investment in accredited specialist training and industry-informed models of care would significantly improve outcomes for artists and strengthen the sector's sustainability.

The well-being of artists and industry professionals is not secondary to artistic excellence — it is fundamental to it.