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Economic Impacts of Mental Ill-Health Consultation
c/o Productivity Commission

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online: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health/submissions>

Re: Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Economic Impacts of Mental Ill-Health

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Issues Paper issued by the Productivity Commission.

Before making specific comments, we will outline who we are and what we do.

Who we are

AMaGA is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing museums and galleries. We encompass a wide and diverse range of national, state, regional and community museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous cultural centres, and Keeping Places across Australia.

All of our members are, however, linked by a shared dedication to culture and the communities they serve. They understand that Australian cultural life is a dynamic ecosystem that generates creativity and innovation and contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the country.

AMaGA is an advocacy, research, service and professional development organisation. We seek to enhance the value of Australia's collections, public programs and stories by sharing knowledge, developing skills, inspiring innovation and providing leadership and the authoritative voice in protecting and promoting our arts, science and cultural heritage.

We advocate for museums and galleries, identify and undertake strategic research, inform policy, set ethical standards and run a broad range of training programs. More information on the organisation and our members can be found at <https://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/annual-reports-0>

We build on a history of museum professional association activity that extends back to the 1930s, have branches in every state and territory, and support professional national networks of expertise. This submission draws both on the lived experience of our galleries and museums, and state, national and international research, expertise and standards.

The cultural sector

The cultural sector is the parallel source of knowledge to the formal education system and museums and galleries, as core parts of this sector, are fundamental sources of information, learning and engagement for people of all ages and abilities. These institutions encourage curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, offer rich aesthetic and emotional experiences through art, science, history and story-telling, and enable people to access objects and collections in ways that enrich lives and society. Furthermore, they help foster the creative industries which are one of the engine houses of the economy. (Henley, 2016)

In the spheres of health and education, extensive research shows that "long term arts engagement supports positive health outcomes", and "arts in education ... contributes in important ways to the factors that underpin learning, such as cognitive abilities, confidence, motivation, problem-solving and communication skills." (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016)

Vital Statistics

- **98%** of Australians engage with the arts. (*Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017*)
- In 2017/18 over 10 million people visited the national collecting institutions (on + off site)
- **33%** of people with a disability had visited a museum or gallery in 2014 (*ABS General Social Survey, 2014*)
- Over 50,000 Australians volunteer in museums and galleries

Key Comments

Please refer [here](#) to our recent submission to the Commonwealth Department for Communications and the Arts on renewing the National Arts and Disability Strategy as it contains detailed information, examples, references and recommendations pertinent to this Inquiry.

In addition to the information in AMaGA's submission referred to above, we would make the following points in relation to museums and galleries, mental health, and social participation and inclusion.

There are several interlinked ways in which to understand the actual or potential roles of museums and galleries and mental health:

- **Access:** how access to museums and galleries, interaction with collections, and participation in programs supports mental health
- **Practice:** the representation of mental health issues in museum practice, such as exhibitions and education programs
- **Employment:** the opportunities for employment in the sector for those living with mental illness
- **Advocacy:** how the sector can advocate with and use a collaborative activist approach to change the lives of those living with mental illness.

These concepts are represented in the brief responses below to the Issues Paper questions on social participation and inclusion:

- *In what ways are governments (at any level) seeking to improve mental health by encouraging social participation and inclusion? What evidence is there that public investments in social participation and inclusion are delivering benefits that outweigh the costs?*

In Australia, at the Commonwealth level, the positive impact of a national arts and disability strategy, targeted legislation, and access to funding opportunities for people with disability has been clearly demonstrated over the last decade. The government has noted in its recent Disability Strategy Discussion Paper that “arts organisations are providing broad, accessible and inclusive participation opportunities, however limited resources and an increasingly constrained fiscal environment is affecting their ability to do so.”

Australian examples of innovative and effective participatory programs in publicly funded museums and galleries include the Art and Dementia programs run by the National Gallery of Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

An example of advocacy and activism within Australia can be seen in the recent forum hosted by the History Trust of South Australia: <https://history.sa.gov.au/events/i-am-an-activist-mental-health-week/>

A recent research study on museum exhibitions about mental health concluded that they were “reducing isolation, developing a sense of worth amongst the mentally ill and allowing community groups to openly discuss their experiences.” (Dudley 2018)

In the UK, there is significant support for public investments in social participation and inclusion through the arts. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing carried out an extensive inquiry in 2016/2017. The three key messages from that inquiry were:

- “The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
- The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long term conditions, loneliness and mental health.
- The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.” (APPG Inquiry 2017)

An increasing body of evidence shows that “museums can bring benefits to individual and community health and wellbeing in their role as public forums for debate and learning, their work with specific audiences through targeted programmes, and by contributing to positive wellbeing and resilience by helping people to make sense of the world and their place within it. . . .” (Dodd and Jones 2014)

Looking at museums and galleries from the perspective of health care providers, social prescribing in the UK for example, is becoming more prevalent. “Social prescribing provides a means for enabling primary care services to refer patients and service users with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of local, non-clinical services, often provided by the voluntary and community sector. Such non-clinical approaches are gaining added resonance within mental health care due to their proactive, preventive qualities, and the opportunities created to provide strategically ‘joined up’ services across a range of cross-sector organisations.” (Wilson and Whelan 2015)

In the UK, there is growing interest on the efficacy of the arts on the prescription/social prescribing model. Evaluation of a pilot program delivered in St Helens in 2015/16 found that “Benefits of attending [the workshops] included improved reported mental health and wellbeing; increased physical activity, and an increase in social activity. A social return on investment conducted as part of the evaluation found that for every £1 invested in the programme, £11.55 was returned in social value.” (Whelan 2016)

- *What role do non-government organisations play in supporting mental health through social inclusion and participation, and what more should they do?*

Most museums in Australia are small, volunteer-managed community organisations which are embedded in their local communities and provide a range of social and economic benefits, including a sense of belonging to their community, and of contributing to society. These museums are generally woefully under-resourced. One of the most useful and cost-effective actions that governments at all levels could do for enhancing social participation is to provide professional advice and an adequate level of funding support for these organisations.

This support should also include measures to help all museums and galleries to implement the critical pathways set out in the Indigenous Roadmap.

Similarly, the work of GLAM Peak over the last three years has revealed the power of digital discoverability and access to collections for increasing participation and social connection by people with a range of capabilities. Strategies and support for the digitisation of collections in regional and community galleries and museums would be an invaluable contribution to Australians’ wellbeing and social engagement.

- *Are there particular population sub-groups that are more at risk of mental ill-health due to inadequate social participation and inclusion? What, if anything, should be done to specifically target those groups?*

Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable, and suicide by Indigenous youth is recognised as at a crisis point. “Western Australian Coroner Ros Fogliani who investigated the circumstances giving rise to the numerous youth deaths by suicide in the Kimberly, found that the impact of colonisation “had a deleterious effect on an ancient and traditional culture.” (Cromb 2019)

AMaGA has just completed the development of a *10-Year Indigenous Roadmap for Change* in the cultural sector. Research findings and clear recommendations, including critical pathways for action by all museums and galleries, are clearly set out. Implementation of this will be crucial for breaking down barriers and improving the participation of Indigenous individuals and communities in our museums and galleries, as well as offering employment opportunities.

Most importantly, the Roadmap sees a future where Indigenous communities have control of their cultural material, which is regarded as a foundational shift in power relationships and addressing the impacts of colonisation and disempowerment. AMaGA’s updated national policy will also promote best practice for museums and galleries to engage with Indigenous people and develop respectful and trusting relationships with their local communities.

Conclusion

AMaGA supports the right of all people to participate freely and actively in the artistic and cultural life of the community - this principle is a cornerstone of social inclusion.

The museum and gallery community has long recognised the need to take affirmative action on inclusion in order to act upon the broader social objectives that are now fundamental to museums’ self-definition. It could do much more with increased and targeted resourcing.

As the Issues Paper declares, “Social participation and inclusion are inextricably linked with mental health and wellbeing.” (p.22) The findings from the research studies noted above and the recommendations made in this submission provide clear direction for a policy framework, encompassing more cross-governmental strategies and programs, along with tangible support for the museum and gallery sector, to significantly improve population mental health over the long term.

Reading/References

Indigenous Roadmap: <https://www.mgaindigenouroadmap.com.au/>

AMaGA Submission to the Commonwealth Department for Communications and the Arts on renewing the National Arts and Disability Strategy, 3 December 2018 at <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/mga-submission-national-arts-and-disability-strategy>

GLAM Peak and Digital Access frameworks: <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/framework>

Six case studies in developing digital access to collections in 2016:

<http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/case-studies>

Darren Henley, *The Arts Dividend: Why investment in culture pays*, 2016

Crossick & Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, AHRC, UK 2016

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, July 2017 [http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative Health Inquiry Report 2017.pdf](http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative%20Health%20Inquiry%20Report%202017.pdf)

Jocelyn Dodd and Ceri Jones, *Mind, Body, Spirit: how museums impact health and wellbeing*, UK 2014 <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/mind-body-spirit-report>

Lachlan Dudley, *Mental health in museums: exploring the reactions of visitors and community groups to mental health exhibitions*, PhD thesis 2018 at <https://openresearchrepository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/155261>

Kerry Wilson and Gayle Whelan, *The Art of Social Prescribing*, 2015 <http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=the-art-of-social-prescribing-informing-policy-on-creative-interventions-in-mental-health-care>

Gayle Whelan, *Evaluation of Creative Alternatives arts on prescription programme*, 2016 <http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=evaluation-of-creative-alternatives-arts-on-prescription-programme>

Natalie Cromb, 22 March 2019, Suicide among First Nations Youth is at Crisis Point <https://www.crikey.com.au/2019/03/22/suicide-among-first-nations-youth-is-at-crisis-point/>

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