



Media Release

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Progressing a National Arts and Health Policy Framework

Today's meeting of the special joint Ministerial Arts and Health Working Group will consider a proposal for a National Arts and Health Policy Framework.

Details of the proposal and strong support for it were agreed at Wednesday's Forum in Canberra, which brought together leading exponents of arts and health from around Australia. The special Forum was convened by the Arts & Health Foundation (AHF) in conjunction with its project partners, the National Rural Health Alliance and Regional Arts Australia.

Opening the Forum, Minister for the Arts, Simon Crean, applauded the decision of both Health and Arts and Culture Ministers to establish the joint Working Group. He noted that an Arts and Health Framework would provide the opportunity for whole-of-government engagement to improve health and wellbeing through arts and health initiatives. He also commented on the way that arts can be used to help achieve broader social and economic outcomes.

The Forum was also addressed by Robyn Archer, AO, recently appointed Deputy Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts. Ms Archer is Creative Director of the Centenary of Canberra 2013 and an Arts & Health Foundation Ambassador. Ms Archer endorsed the work of the Arts & Health Foundation, citing personal experience of the benefits of arts to herself as a child with multiple serious allergies.

"I know how valuable the arts are in bringing hope, optimism and real improvement to those with health challenges, and I hope the Arts & Health Foundation can give such a gift to many others," she said.

Speaking via video, Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, described the Forum as an important step towards increasing awareness of the ways in which the arts can contribute to health care. "Arts and health has, until now, grown out of practice. It is a positive step to be looking at policies to underpin practice: policies informed by a strong evidence base," the Minister said.

The Forum was attended by senior representatives of government arts and health agencies (including a number of members of the Arts and Health Working Group), and by many of Australia's leading exponents of arts and health. They included clinicians, researchers and academics, philanthropists, artists, senior health services personnel, consumer groups, Aboriginal health agencies, arts and disability organisations and community based arts and health advocates.

Those at the Forum provided advice to the Arts and Health Working Group on the possible content and purpose of a National Arts and Health Policy Framework. They discussed how a National Arts and Health Policy Framework will lead to a more cohesive approach to knowledge sharing, sector development and increased resourcing for contemporary arts and health research and practice – with beneficial impacts on the health and wellbeing of the Australian community.

Michael Brogan, Chairman of AHF, said: “We are calling for a national, evidence-based Arts and Health Policy Framework with the status of an official intergovernmental agreement. Those at this week’s meeting stand ready to provide ongoing advice to State, Territory, Federal and local government agencies and it is our belief that, following their example, philanthropy and the corporate sector will be close behind, increasing their support. Strong leadership by national government working in partnership with the non-government sector is critical to the achievement of these outcomes.”

Speaking at the Forum, Gordon Gregory, Executive Director of the National Rural Health Alliance, commented on the strong relationship between involvement in cultural activity and wellbeing. “The Alliance is determined to see that people in rural and remote areas do not miss out on the benefits of this relationship,” he said. “An effective National Arts and Health Policy Framework will need support from agencies across government, including those responsible for the arts, health, education, and regional development.”

Lee Cole, President of Regional Arts Australia, said: “We need a national arts and health framework which will allow artists to more readily engage with the community. Community and individual health is not just about hospitals, and expressing yourself through the arts has been proven to significantly increase positive health outcomes. Increasing our appreciation of the additional benefits that the arts can provide the community need to be addressed by Government and there should be stronger incentives for artists and the community to participate.”

Further details of the Framework are available online at: www.artshealthfoundation.org.au

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