

National Cultural Policy Submission

Support Act

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Support Act acknowledges and pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognises the role of intergenerational song practitioners in establishing the rich and diverse music practices that exist today.

At Support Act, we strive to be an industry leader by setting an example for the music industry through the way we engage with and support First Nations peoples, understanding that First Nations owned and operated music industry organisations and people will lead the way.

We are proud to have Cerisa Benjamin on our staff as First Nations Community Engagement / Social Worker and have encouraged her to utilise First Nations businesses to support the development and implementation of programs and services.

We strongly agree with the Australian Contemporary Music Industry Joint Submission which recommended that the First Nations pillar of the national cultural policy must be strengthened from 'recognise and strengthen' to 'invest, implement and sustain'.

We have recently developed a First Nations Strategic Plan, with input from respected Elders, music and arts workers, to help guide the development of our crisis relief and mental health and wellbeing services for First Nations music workers over the coming years. As part of that process, we identified a number of challenges that need to be addressed. These include the need to:

- Improve access to mental health and crisis relief services for First Nations music workers by ensuring we are a culturally intelligent organisation where First Nations music workers feel safe, supported, heard.
- Increase representation of First Nations people across all areas of the music industry, for example as producers, promoters, managers, A&R people, label managers, marketing and PR professionals as well as artists and musicians.
- Help the non-Indigenous community to understand the impacts of structural racism and colonisation on the mental health of First Nations peoples
- Recognise that there is still a high degree of stigma associated with mental ill health among First Nations music workers

The opportunities we see for Support Act are:

- To ensure that our actions and services are shaped by First Nations people and their diverse cultures and lived experience
- To proactively engage with First Nations owned and operated businesses to help deliver our programs and services
- To help the non-Indigenous community to recognise the critical role of culture, community and country in helping First Nations people to better manage their mental health
- To develop prevention, education and training programs related to mental health that can be accessed by non-Indigenous as well as First Nations music workers. Examples include our Mental Health First Aid training, Yarning Strong Workshop, and forthcoming Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training.

Our hope is the National Cultural Policy will also seek to increase the visibility of First Nations culture, musicians and music workers within the industry; create opportunities for peer support and knowledge sharing and exchange, bring people together, connect existing services and support connection to Country; develop reliable, rich resources and training grounded in cultural protocols; and offer and create opportunities for relevant and culturally intelligent support.

A Place for Every Story

This item is addressed under Pillar 4.

The Centrality of the Artist

This item is addressed under Pillar 4.

Strong Institutions

A healthy, diverse and thriving music industry is good for everyone. It supports the economy, has immeasurable mental health benefits for the community, and creates social cohesion and immense national pride.

But working in music can be tough. Too many people in the music industry are vulnerable to hardship, crisis, mental and physical ill health and these have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent floods and bushfires, and current cost of living pressures.

Earlier this year, Support Act commissioned the [*Mental Health and Wellbeing in Music and Live Performing Arts in Australia*](#) survey, which was conducted in association with the Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University. Some of the key highlights show that:

- 66% of participants had high/very high levels of **psychological distress**, more than 4 x general population.
- 59% had experienced **suicidal thoughts**, 4.5 x the proportion of the general Australian population.
- 35% reported a **current mental health condition**, which is 1.7 x the proportion estimated in the general Australian population
- 29% reported having a **current anxiety condition** and 27% reported currently having **depression**, both more than 2 x that of the general population.
- Over 1/3 of reported incomes from their work in music/live performing arts as **less than \$30,000 per annum**, which is below the poverty line and affects both people's ability to afford the everyday necessities of life, and impacts wellbeing.
- Only 15% said that they felt **safe at work** all of the time.

Some of the conclusions drawn from the research include a need for **further financial and mental health support for people working in music**, as well as a need for **broader change within the sector** and **government support to enable this**.

Participants also want to see action towards **improved pay and working conditions** and **work environments that are safe for everyone's mental and physical health** – including addressing identified issues such as ageism, racism, bullying, unwanted sexual attention or abuse, discrimination based on gender, sexuality, or disability, and other kinds of mistreatment.

Our belief is that the National Cultural Policy needs to acknowledge the unique challenges that people in music face, and that it needs to prioritise the urgent need to continue to support access to industry-specific psychological services, as well as evidence-based prevention, education and training programs, such as the ones that Support Act provides, which are informed and guided by the lived experience of musicians, managers, crew and music workers. These include:

- **Mental Health First Aid** - with dedicated programs for musicians, managers, crew and First Nations music workers
- **Workplace Wellbeing Check In** - designed to help create mentally healthy workplaces across the industry, be that in the office, the studio, backstage at a gig, or on a tour bus.
- **Safety at Work Leadership Training** to ensure greater awareness of safety at work issues
- **Access All Areas** - an active bystander workshop specifically adapted for the music industry to support greater awareness of bullying, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and discrimination in the workplace
- **Financial Wellbeing** workshops - to improve financial literacy, and help address issues of financial insecurity
- **Press Play** - an early intervention mental health and wellbeing program for artists
- **Plug In** - an early intervention mental health and wellbeing program for crew
- **Tune Ups** - a high impact, intimate and revealing 7-part video series on mental health with Australian music heroes.
- **On My Mind** - a monthly online webinar series talking about mental issues that affect music workers featuring music workers with lived experience
- **Yarning Strong** - a bi monthly online webinar series talking about mental health issues that affect First Nations music workers featuring First Nations music workers with lived experience
- **Suicide Prevention Training** - an online training program presented in conjunction with Living Works
- **Backstage Safe Spaces** - mental health and wellbeing support for artists, crew and music workers working at Festivals and on tours.
- **Head First** – our industry conference exploring mental health and wellbeing issues

We have expanded the **Support Act Wellbeing Helpline**, through the addition of dedicated helplines for **First Nations music workers**, **LGBTQIA+ music workers**, and people who need to support with **sexual health and safety** issues.

We have also workshopped a draft set of **Minimum Standards for a Mentally Healthy Music Industry**; and we have been pleased to auspice the **National Music Industry Review**, and look forward to playing a key role in helping to implement some of its recommendations.

With more than 11,000 new service users over the past 2 years, we anticipate that there will be continued demand for crisis relief support over the coming years due to injury, illness, mental ill-health and financial hardship.

We are continuing to expand our model of care to provide a holistic wraparound and referral-based support for service users, and will continue to support the needs of those music workers who are ageing, including crew and those who do not have sufficient superannuation, savings or assets to fall back on when their ability to work diminishes.

Support Act will require additional resourcing to manage this increasing caseload to ensure that it can continue to:

- Assess what support is needed through brief interventions, including but not limited to financial support.
- Provide information and referral about a range of other specialist service providers in health, mental health, housing, financial services, and addiction counselling
- Increase case work activities including regular contact with service users over the duration of support
- Deepen our crisis relief network of industry providers, researchers and academics.

Statement from the Board of Support Act:

For 25 years Support Act has provided practical help to music industry professionals in crisis. Our short-term financial support has helped to pay the rent, put food on the table, enable life changing medical help, and keep people connected while they get back on their feet. We also provide funeral support so that music workers who have died can be farewelled with dignity.

Over recent years, we have developed and delivered high quality mental health and wellbeing counselling support to the music and live performing arts sector, as well as prevention, education and training programs and services that address the specific issues faced by people who work in music, including First Nations music workers.

Today, we have grown to become the music community's largest charity provider of support – promoting a diverse and thriving music culture with the goal that all music workers should feel safe, secure, supported, valued, heard and enjoy improved health and economic security. We have become a trusted partner with Government, and a trusted source of evidence based, industry specific mental health and wellbeing support for the professional music community.

Over the coming years, our goal is to deepen our partnership with the Australian Government to ensure we are at the centre of improving the health, wellbeing and economic outcomes for our music workers, while at the same time leading positive cultural change within the wider industry.

We thank you for the opportunity to participate in the development of a National Cultural Policy and look forward to being an organisation / institution that can help the Australian contemporary music industry to rebuild and realise its local and global potential.

Submitted by:

Clive Miller
CEO
Support Act
22 August 2022