

National Cultural Policy Submission

[Name of submitter] Schizy Inc.

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

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:

A Place for Every Story

1.1 Schizy Inc is a leader of Disability led Arts in Australia. We are the only organisation to represent and support diverse creatives in the public mental health system. Schizy Inc has been supporting artists to make, show and produce their stories through performing arts, visual arts, music and film since 2008. We have a membership base of around 50 creatives and are a registered NFP with DGR status and are managed by a Committee, all who have lived/living experience of complex mental health such as schizophrenia.

Schizy Inc calls for Australian arts establishments to actively respect that people in the lower socio-economic bracket accessing public mental health and psychiatric services, are no longer to be exploited for their 'illness, reality or their story' by non-disabled arts companies or arts-makers. People in this creative cohort deserve to be supported to be viable owners, creators and presenters of their own stories through the arts. We call for Funding bodies and arts services to ask grant/project applicants to state their lived/living experience relevance to any work that involves people or stories around complex mental health realities such as schizophrenia. This should not mean our stories and culture is silenced or disenfranchised, but provide opportunity for a new cultural aesthetic to emerge.

1.2 We ask that Funders and Arts establishments actively acknowledge the equity of street-level research and practice values of lived experience of disabled led organisations such as Schizy Inc. We ask that Arts bodies seek out and champion relationships with pioneering disabled-led arts organisations such as Schizy Inc, who have built up strong wisdoms viable to art, artists and audiences, but divergent to the pervasive academic and westernised business model privilege paradigm. Learn our language and desire our expertise from our point of view.

1.3 Schizy Inc calls for cultural mental health representation in the Arts, in all levels of engagement. It's not acceptable that young people, those with little experience in the public mental health system (including realities around houselessness, ongoing social

and economic poverty, opportunity disenfranchisement etc), those with general occupational mental health realities or mental health professionals, are being given consultancy, advisory and leadership roles in wisdom-sharing around mental health lived experience and the arts. There is a huge difference between 'mental health wellbeing' of arts practitioners, and the access and inclusion experience of creatives, and creative organisations, with lifelong complex mental health realities such as schizophrenia, getting the right and ability to tell and show their stories. By not supporting mental health arts leaders like Schizy Inc to do what we do, the Arts are in danger of mis-appropriating access wisdoms and diluting the experience of Disability within the Social and Human Rights models.

1.3 Schizy Inc calls for the Arts to take on the responsibility to resource public psychiatric spaces with access to tools, people and pathways to the arts. There are 161 public psychiatric wards in Australia and most are chronically void of the basic human right to be able to access tools and resources to express voice. In 2019–20, there were **172,641** admitted mental health-related hospitalisations with specialised psychiatric care; equivalent to a national rate of 67.5 per 10,000 population (1). Due to the lack of access to the arts from being in this highly disadvantaged group, this is a massive under-acknowledged community of story-tellers who will never go on to express their stories in any other way than within the medical model.

The Arts in Australia have a responsibility to rectify this human rights violation in accordance with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability;

Article 30. 2. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilise their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.

By providing all public psychiatric wards with creative resources and intelligence, we will enable a highly proportioned group of creative people to experience and contribute to the arts culture from *where they are*, rather than making the arts journey a privileged pathway to those few with support. This could be calling for the development of a National public psychiatric system arts and cultural strategy, enabling regular and ongoing access to art materials/resources in all public psychiatric wards, engaging lived experience arts leaders and makers, and create opportunities for traumatised people to make and own the art of telling story as part of the *healing experience*. It's proven that people with complex trauma who are enabled to share their stories through the arts, have far greater opportunity for wellbeing and social connection improvement.

(1) Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare 19 July 2022. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/overnight-admitted-mental-health-related-care>

The Centrality of the Artist

1.1 We ask that all Funding bodies ask for transparency about who writes Disabled arts grants, and this information is provided to funding panels. It's important that grant-writers with cognitive and psychiatric disability are not disadvantaged in the grant market by unknowingly competing with non-disabled grant writers submitting applications on behalf of disabled applicants.

1.2 Access costs should never be embedded in the Artist or Producer grant fund such as with a current Australia Council Disability Grant (Aug 2022). Access funds should be a separate add-on amount. For example, Auslan Interpreters charge upwards of \$160/hr and it's not fair that Disabled independent producers have to pay this out of their often meagre funding income. An example is a recent theatre performance by a Schizy Inc member was awarded a \$4000 local government grant and over \$1000 was for the services of an Auslan interpreter for a show, which included FOH interpreting, script preparation and rehearsal time. It was made worse by the fact the show was cancelled by covid and the full amount still had to be paid. In the end the only people who have been paid from this still yet-to-be performed project was the Auslan interpreter and their Agency.

Reaching the Audience

1.1 Ensure Arts forums for arts practitioners include representation from Disabled lived experience led organisations including Schizy inc. It's not acceptable that a lived experience guest speaker is on stage imparting hard earned wisdom, but not sitting in numbers around the tables, and designing the forums.

1.2 Engage expert leaders like Schizy Inc to create accessible and inclusive audience experiences for the benefit of all people, including anyone with environmental realities. This is more than providing a Quiet Room. It's about knowing first-hand why a Quiet Room is needed and creating the architecture and attitudes that reduce the need for one. It's about understanding mental health themes in a work, and how to present them in ways that are respectful of unspoken lived/living experience of audience members and crew; one in four people.

Schizy Inc asserts that it's not appropriate for a member of another Disability community to represent and advise on behalf of people with psychiatric and mental health disability. An example of this is happening presently with Arts Access Victoria and FRINGE disability representatives advising Art Centre

Melbourne about mental health access, even though they are not in our community. We would like Arts bodies to do the work and seek us out.

1.3 We would ask that the Arts ensure quality shows at places like Melbourne Art Centre are not disabling to potential audience goes on very low income such as psychiatrically disabled people, people in tenuous employment and houseless people. Most quality shows at a good venue start at \$90 for a 'cheap seat' and this equates to 20% of a weekly Centrelink Disability pension (<\$500/week), if you consider many people with psychiatric disability are unable to access employment, going to see a quality show is never possible. We call for Arts venues to provide concession rates for people on low incomes to all international shows.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

A Place for Every Story

Schizy Inc is the only organisation in Australia that provides pathways to the arts for people in the public mental health system. We are a registered NFP and have been producing innovative and quality arts projects and events for this community since 2008, and are the only collective voice for people with schizophrenia. We rely on donations and one-off grants, yet all of us are disabled by mental health realities that present many more barriers to business than non-disabled arts organisations. This includes grant writing and competing in a market with applicants and producers who don't have cognitive and social disability.

Schizy Inc know the reality of the public mental health system, because we've lived it. We know that the NDIS destroyed all our cultural gathering spaces in its insistence for 1:1 social support over arts groups. Because of this, in 2022 with Support from Creative Victoria Creative Ventures, Schizy Inc opened the country's first art studio run by and for people with mental health realities.

Schizy Inc was founded and is directed by Heidi Everett, an arts advocate, performing arts maker and independent producer. Heidi is a proud member of Naarm (Melbourne) Disability Arts community and ensures Schizy Inc is in line with global Disability rights wisdoms and practices.

The Centrality of the Artist

Heidi is aware of the inequity of grant market for people in the psychiatric system, with many disabled arts producers now employing non-disabled grant writers through NDIS packages.

Reaching the Audience

Heidi Everett and Schizy Inc have a strong desire to ensure the Arts is accessible and inclusive of all people with psychiatric disability, which by nature includes people who are houseless, people with lifelong social and economic poverty, people without educational or opportunity privilege, and those without means to think themselves artistic.