

PACFA's College of Creative and Experiential Therapies submission: National Cultural Policy



Image credit:

“Gooloo’s Scar Tree” by Gooloo
(100cm x 120cm; multimedia on canvas)
Finalist in Brisbane Portrait Prize - 2021

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)'s College of Creative and Experiential Therapies (C.CET), an organisation with arts-components. As members of C.CET, we are workers and professionals in industries that use the arts, and some of us identify as artists as well as creative arts therapists.

In this submission, we introduce C.CET within PACFA. In response to the five pillars, we outline aspects of our creative arts and cultural practices to illustrate our particular values and skill sets. We highlight the contributions we bring. These contributions are presented as opportunities for collaboration that the new National Cultural Policy can integrate, and that can benefit our communities. Finally, we include six things that we would like to see in a National Cultural Policy.

Introducing C.CET

Many Creative Arts Therapists register with the national organisation, Psychotherapy and Counselling Foundation of Australia (PACFA). ([PACFA](#)) is a National peak body representing the self-regulating allied health professions of psychotherapy and counselling. PACFA has recently established a new division, the [College of Creative and Experiential Therapies](#), (C.CET) to provide an Australian professional home for therapists who work using 'more than verbal methods' in their work with people. These therapies include Creative Arts Therapies like visual art, dance/movement, drama and music, as well as embodied and experiential approaches like nature therapy and animal assisted therapy. All of these therapies are supported by a growing evidence base and were included in the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

PACFA is our preferred registering body for a number of reasons:

- PACFA is a well-respected Australian focused organisation.
- PACFA is actively engaged in the Australian mental health landscape. All members meet [Australian standards](#) with a strong emphasis on ethical practice.
- PACFA members are listed on the Australian Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists ([ARCAP](#))

The original 5 goals of the [2013 Creative Australia National Cultural Policy](#) were:

Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia.

Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators.

Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.

Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century.

For the purposes of the consultation we have distilled these into 5 pillars:

- First Nations
- A Place for Every Story
- Centrality of the Artist
- Strong Institutions
- Reaching the Audience.

Challenges and opportunities: how each of the 5 pillars are important to us and our practice and why.

First Nations

C.CET's Leadership Team includes Tara Harriden, an Aboriginal Arts Therapist who belongs to Wiradjuri Mob. She has a private Arts Therapy practice in Brisbane and offers clinical supervision (traditional and therapeutic arts-based) to health professionals, teachers, disability support workers and others in the human services sectors. Tara is the Pastoral Care representative on the National Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and is also undertaking her own research, in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who experience psychosocial disabilities, investigating the benefits of cultural safety-centred, arts-based clinical supervision for mental health / psychosocial disability support workers.

The College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices ([CATSIHP](#)) within PACFA exists specifically to provide leadership, representation and advocacy as well as promote self-determination, cultures, values and belief systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through increasing access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healers and practitioners and improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

C.CET's commitment to honouring First Nations art and culture, working for social justice and engaging decolonising practices in Creative and Experiential Therapies is guided by listening to Tara's voice in our Leadership Team and developing our relationship with CATSIHP.

C.CET within PACFA is committed to transformative thinking to empower and centralise First Nations people, voices and leadership; through embedding Acknowledgement of Country in our work, consultation and collaboration with local

First Nations leaders in our planning of activities and events, and through deep listening and truth telling. We act with the knowledge that individual and collective health and wellbeing are intrinsically linked together, and these in turn are woven together in culture, creative practices and the arts. Collective health and wellbeing is necessary to support individual wellness. Culture, creativity and the arts are necessary to support collective wellness. Only a well, healthy culture can support wellness. Only a truth telling culture is a well culture. It is on these premises that we support the deep listening and truth telling that is essential for any real collective healing, health and wellbeing to be shared by all people in this continent. We know that the arts and cultural practices have been for millenia, and still are, essential ways for truth telling and deep listening to occur, and we work in ways that consciously enable this.

A Place for Every Story

Creative and Experiential Therapists are committed to person centred practice, making the invisible visible, and giving voice to subjugated stories.

We work by using the arts and creative practices in ways that facilitate the sharing of diverse stories through art. We know this to be an iterative process whereby stories generate more stories, more truth-telling, more taboo breaking, more respect, understanding, acceptance, safety, healing, reclamation, regeneration and belonging.

For example:

Story about an Elder and Art Therapy

A Gooreng Gooreng Elder, who had experienced severe and ongoing trauma in and out of orphanages (situated nowhere near her Country) during her childhood and youth came to try Art Therapy. She stated she had only ever seen two photos of her as a child – one of her at about 12 months old, and one as a young teenager. Elder had reconnected with her Country, language, and kin as an adult. She stated she wanted to find and re-connect her “little girl me”.

Over 12 months, attending Art Therapy weekly (for several hours each week), this Elder created a 100x120cm multimedia image of ‘her’ Scar Tree, featured above. A blend of several different art media, natural (from her Country) and synthetic materials, traditional Gooreng Gooreng and ‘Western’ techniques and mark-making styles, this self-portrait went on to be a finalist in the Brisbane Portrait Prize in 2021. The Elder who made it said making this artwork had helped her to find, understand and honour the many strengths of the little girl who survived to become the Elder today.

The Elder frequently comments that Art Therapy has not only got her along way along the ‘recovery’ road, but that she really needs and wants to keep attending weekly because Art Therapy is the one thing that supports her social emotional wellbeing, mostly because she maintains her connection to Kin and Country through her painting.

- Tara Harriden, Art Therapist

A story of exploring culture and customs for safe families

A recent workshop exploring family violence primary prevention topics has unpacked a community's understandings of culture, customs, traditions and social practices.

Through our workshop, community members recognized what they love about their culture, but also began to evaluate unhealthy elements within social practices, that have been perpetuating discrimination.

We identified that some social practices are out-moded and not necessarily promoting the truth and values of the culture. We explored how customs may be adjusted to truly express culture, and we began to understand the differences between wellness-promoting culture, and harmful social practices.

- Lisa Moseley, Creative Arts Therapist

The Centrality of the Artist

Creative and Experiential Therapists are creatives, members of arts and cultural communities and industries. Creative and Experiential Therapists' relationships with artists and their art aspire to be mindful and sensitive to artists' culture, and promote broader dialogue, within therapy and throughout the artists' communities.

Arts, creativity and wellbeing is an inter-sectorial field. Artists, Creative Arts Therapists and other Allied Health Professionals have distinctive yet overlapping expertise and skills to bring. Arts and health programs and projects can benefit from having Artists, Creative Arts Therapists and other Allied Health Professionals collaborate to create holistic responses that are artistically, relationally and ethically robust. In addition, inter-sectorial collaboration can enable greater understanding and respect for the expertise and skill sets that each practitioner brings as an important part of the bigger picture.

An example of such inter-sectorial collaboration can be seen in the diverse practitioners who attended the 2021 and 2022 Creative Mental Health Forums in Boon Wurrung Country, South East Gippsland (see the 12 minute documentary film here: <https://vimeo.com/578978435>). The programming has brought together Traditional Owners, First Nations Healing Practitioners, Creative Arts Therapists working with visual arts, dance/movement, drama and music, as well as Arts Practitioners including Actors, Visual Artists, Musicians and Dancers and allied health professionals including Psychologists, Counsellors, Nurses and Social Workers (see the 2022 program here: <https://carlavanlaar.com/program-2022-creative-mental-health-forum-and-self-care-retreat/>).

The structure of the Creative Mental Health Forum enables knowledge sharing and relationship building opportunities for attendees that support the possibilities of new collaborations between diverse inter-sectorial practitioners. Sharing time and working together enables the dissolution of perceived differences and territorialism in the landscape of Arts and Wellbeing, whilst building respect for others' distinct skills and

expertise, and also provides peer support for practitioners within an arts focused culture and community of practice.

An expanded view of art therapy opens up the possibilities for artist / creative arts therapists to work as artists in residence in all sorts of unconventional settings including, for example, schools, corporate offices, police stations or public open space. In practising art making with others in unconventional settings, what becomes important as a skilled therapeutic arts facilitator is not merely the design of the activity itself, but how we practise; intersubjectively, artistically, with refined sensibilities about the qualitative aspects of what we do.

Creative Arts Therapists can bring particular skill sets to interdisciplinary teams planning and implementing collaborative arts and health initiatives.

Strong Institutions

PACFA's C.CET upholds a culture of inclusion, respect and dedication to excellence of services to promote well-being. It promotes and actively supports progressive and transformative processes for its members who then in turn provide this for their communities of clients.

Central to increasing well-being for clients and their communities, are principles of anti-discrimination and intersectionality. Creative Experiential Therapists work to support people's expression of personal experience; we understand that culture is an expression of collective identity.

C.CET will promote methodologies and transformative thinking to empower and centralise First Nations people, voices and leadership (see section above about First Nations focus). This includes but is not limited to a commitment to identifying and challenging harmful practices within systems, such as schools, community centres, religious settings, council areas, state policies, families, etc.

C.CET therapists have capacities such as arts-based research skills and collaborative practice in the arts, are asked to be cognizant of ethical and social issues, and maintain their professional standards, including codes of conduct, through supervision and ongoing professional development to maintain currency. These capacities that C.CET therapists have, offer opportunities to utilise our skills and experience in planning, delivering and evaluating collaborative community based arts and cultural initiatives.

PACFA's C.CET aspires to be a strong institution itself, supporting us to work collaboratively with communities and other institutions to nurture and enable transformative experiences of culture.

Reaching the Audience

C.CET therapists' core practice is to support healing, wellness and relationships. We facilitate in ways that enhance possibilities for safety, calm, connection, efficacy and hope. We understand that Culture is a living and evolving expression of a community's lived experience of collective identity, and that it is always changing and emerging. Thus, expressing and performing culture is an opportunity for nurturing and developing community members' sense of truth; about their current lives, and the histories of their families' and community's journey throughout the world, across time.

C.CET therapists are trained and experienced in ways that can mindfully bring forth cultural expression.

C.CETs have adapted to the pandemic, using technology to engage audiences in creative activities that support community's capacities for health and wellbeing.

C.CET therapists enable and facilitate engagement in creative and cultural practices, activities, social groups and communities. A wave of change is being created by the numerous C.CET therapists engaging and working with individuals and communities in these creative, gentle, respectful ways.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

- There should be a base level of non-competitive Arts funding for all Australian communities as part of health promotion and preventative community health strategies.
- Funding should enable communities to design their own sustainable programs and projects.
- Every person should have access to a culturally safe and accessible art making space.
- Funding should be made available to community based Arts Organisations to initiate and support regional inter-disciplinary knowledge sharing and relationship building events.
- Creative Arts Therapists should be included in inter-disciplinary teams that plan and implement local Arts and Wellbeing programs and projects.
- Research and evaluation should be sophisticated and use the expertise that exists within the Arts and Arts Therapy community, in relation to arts based research.

We may use some of your words as part of the National Cultural Policy Report. If we do, how would you like us to attribute your words? (tick your choice of attribution and complete the fields if applicable)

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