



Mind your own showbiz: Acting on the mental health needs of the Australian entertainment industry

Key research findings and
recommendations



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Everymind

Everymind is a leading institute dedicated to the prevention of mental ill-health and suicide. **Everymind** has been delivering successful mental health and suicide prevention programs in Australia for over 25 years.

The Prevention Hub

The Prevention Hub is Australia’s first integrated research translation initiative for preventing anxiety and depression. Co-led by the Black Dog Institute and **Everymind**, The Prevention Hub focuses on implementing and evaluating preventive strategies for anxiety and depression in a wide range of settings to achieve the greatest possible impact and reach.

Entertainment Assist

Entertainment Assist is a national charity dedicated to raising awareness about mental health in the Australian entertainment industry by commissioning research for workplace and educational transformation and identifying support pathways for those in distress.

Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment

The Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment (AAWE) is an Entertainment Assist cross-sector peer-to-peer initiative, for shared interest in positive mental health and wellbeing behaviours for a sustainable Australian entertainment industry. Founding members include Arts Wellbeing Collective, Ausdance National, Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare, Entertainment Assist, Live Performance Australia, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Music Australia, Screen Producers Australia and The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts, along with peak bodies, sector representatives, employers, employees and freelancers within Australia’s live and recorded entertainment industry.

Foreword

This report, “Mind Your Own Showbiz!” is the result of the first national research project completed by the Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment (AAWE).

Formed by Entertainment Assist on World Mental Health Day (10 October 2017), AAWE is an alliance of the industry with a commitment to develop and action a prevention first framework for mental health and wellbeing in the Australian entertainment industry.

The collaboration of the AAWE Advisory Committee is a great example of working together for a shared interest for the greater good of the industry - and we thank all involved. This first national approach, a cross-sector initiative working with peak bodies and all sectors of the entertainment industry, removed duplication of effort and reinforced the shared interest in improving the mental health and wellbeing for our entertainment industry workers. This union of all sectors of the industry is a practical approach in affecting change together.

The national study was a combination of face-to-face feedback workshops and an online survey, providing a significant data set. A huge thanks to the 1600+ people who took the time to share their insights and needs around mental health in the workplace. This in-depth study provided the qualified research for this report to identify all sector considerations and understanding the differing parameters and settings our people work across. The report calls for individuals, members, guilds, association, clubs to act, to help and affect change. AAWE aims to shine a light on issues identified in the report that need to be improved.

A very big thanks to the AAWE mental health partner, **Everymind**. To the **Everymind** team, your dedicated team and research quality continue to be a welcomed and greatly valued contribution for this alliance.

There’s more work to do as the entertainment industry has one of the largest challenges ahead, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be a focus of building a roadmap to recovery and getting mental health services to our people in need.

Julia Edwards

JULIA EDWARDS, GENERAL MANAGER, ENTERTAINMENT ASSIST

Everymind is pleased for the opportunity to work with Entertainment Assist and the Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment (AAWE) in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Australian entertainment industry workers.

While Australia’s entertainment industry makes a significant contribution both socially and economically, research has found people working in entertainment experience a high risk of mental ill-health and suicide.

To support workers, the Institute facilitated three research activities and consulted with the entertainment industry around the perceived needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities for improving mental health outcomes for people working in the sector.

This report highlights the various research activities undertaken by **Everymind**, along with priorities identified and recommendations made to improve the mental health outcomes of entertainment industry workers.

We thank all of the entertainment industry professionals who took the time to participate in the consultations to share their knowledge, experience and expertise, and very much look forward to seeing efforts strengthened to support the mental health and wellbeing of all Australian entertainment workers.

Carmel Loughland

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CARMEL LOUGHLAND, ACTING DIRECTOR, EVERYMIND





Snapshot

Throughout 2017-18, **Everymind** facilitated three research activities on behalf of Entertainment Assist, a national charity advocating for mental wellbeing in the performing and recorded arts. **Everymind** consulted with the entertainment industry around the perceived needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities for improving mental health outcomes for people working in the sector.

Previous research clearly established the high risk of mental ill-health and suicide for people working in the entertainment industry [1]. Building on that work, **Everymind’s** research focused on identifying industry professionals’ preferences to strategically address the mental health needs of the industry, including ways to reduce stigma, improve mental health literacy and encourage help-seeking behaviour.

The research activities included:

- 1. Australian entertainment industry national wellness study – consultation workshops
- 2. Australian entertainment industry national wellness study – online survey
- 3. Mental health and wellbeing of Australian entertainment industry professionals: A survey of people working in small business.

Across the three research activities, the data represented more than 1,600 individual responses.

Of those respondents, 59 percent were women and the majority were between the ages of 25 and 54.

Most respondents were people living in New South Wales and Victoria, mostly in capital cities, and around 70 percent earn their primary income from working in the entertainment industry.

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There must be support systems put in place to help our industry professionals and there needs to be an attitude shift...on what is acceptable practice for treatment of industry professionals.

- BROADCAST PRODUCER, NSW

New research reveals that Australian entertainment industry professionals desire immediate action to address the increased risk they face for mental ill-health and suicidal behaviour. Priorities include mental health education, enhanced strategies for reducing and managing known industry-related risks, and improved, tailored supports.

New research examining the mental health priorities of the Australian entertainment industry recommends immediate action to ensure safety, support and education for industry professionals, as well as action to address the known work-related risks to mental wellbeing.

Research participants expressed urgency around the need to address stigma, provide safe and supportive spaces to connect and to challenge/report unsupportive attitudes and behaviours, increase supports and access to services, and address conditions that are perceived to increase psychological risk (such as unhealthy work hours, working in isolation and dealing with traumatic content).

Improved mental health education, which was regarded as critical, needs to be made available free or at minimal cost, at regular intervals during training (where applicable) and career, targeted at industry sectors and roles, and addressing priority content, such as mental health and mental illness, alcohol and other substances, and industry-specific risk factors.

Other recommendations were that wellbeing strategies be embedded into professional entertainment practice and policy, to identify and reduce risk; as well as the more general need to increase capacity for all levels of the industry (including government) to fulfil duty of care to support entertainment professionals’ wellbeing.

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You are on a high, on the road accomplishing great feats, getting fed, living in hotels, getting a schedule for your day and life then you go home, you’re alone, you have bills, house work and lots of time with no work...these people are very high at risk.

- PERFORMING ARTS SUPPORT WORKER, QLD

Why should we be concerned about the mental health of people working in the Australian entertainment industry?

A world-first research study conducted in 2016 revealed that Australian entertainment industry professionals are at substantially increased risk for mental ill-health and suicide [1].

The research, conducted at Victoria University on behalf of national advocate for mental wellbeing in the arts, Entertainment Assist, complemented the growing evidence base for the need to improve and promote entertainment industry professionals’ mental health and wellbeing [2, 3].

In 2017, Entertainment Assist established the Australian Alliance for Wellbeing in Entertainment (AAWE) – a cross-sector, peer-to-peer initiative with representation from the most prominent peak bodies in entertainment including Live Performance Australia; Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA); Ausdance National; Music Australia; Screen Producers Australia; and more.

Entertainment Assist invited **Everymind** – a leading Institute dedicated to the prevention of mental ill-health and suicide in Australia - to participate as its key mental health and research partner.

Everymind committed to furthering the research efforts by facilitating consultation with the sector around the perceived needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities for improving mental health outcomes for people working in the entertainment industry.

Throughout 2017-18, **Everymind** facilitated three research activities on behalf of Entertainment Assist, outlined below:

Australian entertainment industry national wellness study – Phase 1: AAWE consultation forums

A series of national consultation workshops were delivered in all Australian capital cities to a cross-section of entertainment industry professionals. Data was collected in focus group settings, guided by a set of open-ended questions. Group discussions gave participants an opportunity to freely share opinions and experiences of the state of mental wellbeing within the entertainment industry.

Australian entertainment industry national wellness study – Phase 2: Online survey

To expand on data collected from the face-to-face consultations, an online survey was disseminated to gather more comprehensive information from across the entertainment industry regarding:

- Perspectives on the industry’s current approach to supporting the mental wellbeing of its workforce.
- Approaches to identifying and seeking help for mental ill-health among entertainment industry professionals.
- Perceived gaps and suggested improvements to the industry’s current approach to mental wellbeing.
- Key mental health and wellbeing priorities of entertainment industry professionals.
- Perspectives on education and training in mental health and wellbeing for entertainment industry professionals.
- Preferences for additional supports for mental wellbeing.

Mental health and wellbeing of Australian entertainment industry professionals: A survey of people working in small business

Through research conducted in 2017 [4], **Everymind** sought to gain a better understanding of the specific mental health needs of small business in Australia and to assess the acceptability and feasibility of digital interventions.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [5], Australian entertainment industry professionals are vastly more likely to be freelance or self-employed compared to Australia’s general working population.

The number of entertainment industry professionals who completed the survey for small business allowed for discrete analysis of the responses from an entertainment-only cohort. The research yielded preliminary data on the extent of self-reported mental health issues and a number of associated factors, including a range of personal, social, workplace and employment characteristics.

The research also elicited data on current help-seeking behaviour for mental health related concerns, and the feasibility and acceptability of online approaches to addressing mental ill-health.



“There are so many aspects of mental health that we are not made aware of in entertainment. We learn to accept that we are different, as well as learning to accept high levels of stress...we find it hard to draw the line between what is normal and what is a sign of mental illness.

- DANCER NSW

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Who was represented in these studies?

In this report, the term ‘entertainment industry professionals’ covers the broad spectrum of the performing arts, live and recorded, across all mediums and levels, including but not limited to performers, support workers, crew and technicians.*

Across the three research activities, the data represented:



1,621 individual responses.



Around 70 percent of respondents earn their primary income from the entertainment industry.



A wide age range. Most respondents were between 25 and 54, with smaller numbers aged 17-24 and over 65.

The Australian entertainment industry broadly employs more people in the 25-29 age group than any other.*



A broad range of experience, from students to retirees with 20+ years in the business. More than half of respondents had at least 10 years’ industry experience, with around 20 percent in the 11-15 year range.



Slightly more engagement from females (average 59.7 percent). The entertainment industry generally has a slightly higher male representation (roughly 66 percent overall, however this varies greatly by individual sub-sectors and roles).*



A broad range of occupations and roles, with the highest number of respondents identifying as ‘performing artists and music composers’ or ‘performing arts support workers’. Support roles included: art director, artist manager, costume designer, director of photography, film and video editor, health professional (arts), media producer, program director, stage manager, venue manager and writer/playwright. The most frequently represented individual roles were actor, musician and producer.



Mostly (but not exclusively) people living in NSW and Victoria, mostly from capital cities, as per distribution of people working in the industry more generally.



Representation of cultural and linguistic diversity (18-25 percent) and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples (<2 percent) was proportionate to current industry demographics.



A diversity of occupation types, with more than half of the industry professionals who took part in the National Wellbeing Study reporting as freelance, either part-time or full-time.

*To assist in defining roles and to align with previous research, the researchers referenced industry groupings defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ report titled “Employment in Culture Australia 6273.0” 2011, specifically, the sub-categories of: Performing Artists and Music Composers; Performing Arts Support Workers; and Broadcasting, Film and Recorded Media Equipment Operators [5].



What do entertainment industry professionals think about current wellbeing strategies in their workforce?

The majority of people consulted across the research activities could not specifically identify existing programs in mental health for people working in the entertainment industry.

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This industry has high expectations of overcommitment from both management and employees, who are under-resourced with time and ability.

- PROGRAM DIRECTOR, VIC

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- Of the small number of existing programs identified, respondents commended those working to improve mental health awareness and provide a safe space to ask questions and create a sense of community. Others reported that they felt existing programs fell short in adequately meeting industry needs, particularly with regard to accessibility, cost and relevance.
- Research participants identified a general absence of integrated supports within the workplace, an overall lack of awareness around mental health issues, and insufficient availability or accessibility to support services.
- Participants noted specific barriers to accessing support such as cost, rigid time constraints, lack of industry insight by health practitioners, and stigma.

What do entertainment industry professionals currently do when either they or someone they know needs support for their mental wellbeing?

Stigma is considered by entertainment industry professionals to be a significant barrier to help-seeking and to disclosing mental health concerns with others in the workplace.

- When it comes to their own mental health and wellbeing, entertainment industry professionals are reportedly more likely to seek help from a health professional or a friend than sources such as helplines, online apps or pamphlets.
- When concerned about a colleague’s mental wellbeing, industry professionals were reportedly more likely to seek information from a friend, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or online sources.

- On average, only around half of those consulted were confident that they knew who to contact for support for mental health concerns, drug or alcohol problems or information to support someone bereaved by suicide.
- The small business survey results indicated that people working in entertainment are generally accepting of mental ill-health in others, yet reluctant to disclose their own personal mental health challenges with others in the workplace.



“

We need a culture of looking out for developing problems in our colleagues and encouraging them to seek help.

- MUSICIAN, QLD

”

What do entertainment industry professionals see as the current gaps in addressing mental health problems in the industry? What improvements do they suggest?

“

The attitude is that performers don't rest, the show must go on. Performers provide an escape for the public, they're in the public eye, so you must stay positive and uplifting. This is a very difficult image to uphold.

- DANCER, NSW

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When respondents were asked what improvements they would like to see, the most common themes were:

- Improved support role and duty of care of managers/ employers
- Enhanced support for social connection within and outside of work
- A reduction in stigma surrounding mental ill-health
- Increased opportunities for debriefing
- Additional safe and inclusive spaces for people experiencing mental ill-health
- Expanded access to tailored mental health information and advice.

When asked to identify what is missing to support the mental wellbeing of people working in the entertainment industry, the most common themes were around problematic or unsupportive work culture and behaviours that are perceived to negatively impact on mental wellbeing, such as bullying, harassment and alcohol and substance misuse.

“

The responsibility lies with everyone. As an individual, it is important to protect myself. As a business, it is important for my employer to provide such training to ensure I have the tools to look after myself and others and therefore, my employer's assets. School/training providers should be putting this into training. The knowledge and conversation needs to start before a problem develops.

- VENUE MANAGER, VIC

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What do entertainment industry professionals think are the most important issues when it comes to improving mental wellbeing?

When asked what the most pressing issues are with regard to mental health and wellbeing, entertainment industry professionals expressed a desire to prioritise education, identifying and managing risk and improving supports.

“

Physical and mental health support services with a strong relationship with the entertainment industry. It’s important that individuals know there is a growing body of studies backed by empirical evidence.

- MUSICIAN, NSW

”

Entertainment industry professionals expressed a desire and need for...

Education and training

Accessible, tailored education and training in mental wellbeing and self-care to be embedded into current training and job pathways and supported at all industry levels, from training institutions to employers, workplaces, unions, peak bodies and government. Overall, research participants rated training in mental health and wellbeing as being very important.

Perceived barriers to such training included financial constraints, a lack of structural support (including a fragmented workforce), and a generally unsupportive culture of “the show must go on”. However, suggestions also included ways to facilitate change, such as enhanced workplace and industry policies, linking with external supports and targeted awareness-raising campaigns.

With regard to specific topic areas, the highest rated was identifying risk of suicide, followed closely by identifying affordable services, mental wellbeing in the workplace, and information on accessing mental health support services.

Other training preferences included: Training that is industry and/or role specific, has elements of Mental Health First Aid, addresses behavioural and cultural issues and is mandated and/or supported by policy.

Identifying and managing risk

Identifying and addressing the risks inherent in the industry, including precarious working conditions that lead to job and financial insecurity; unhealthy work hours and fatigue; problems associated with touring and isolation; dealing with traumatic content; unsupportive or negative workplace culture; and problems around alcohol and drug misuse.

Suggestions around managing risk included regular debrief opportunities and creating risk classification systems for safe allocation to roles and appropriate referral pathways.

Support

Increased support for mental wellbeing. This included the provision of accessible, low-cost services, available throughout training and career and provided by health professionals with a sound knowledge of the industry.

Respondents expressed very strong support for an industry-specific mental health and wellbeing service.

Recommendations

Entertainment industry professionals were asked, which individuals or groups they saw as having a role in improving mental health outcomes for the industry. They were then asked to identify specific actions that those individuals or groups can take to enact meaningful change.

The themes emerging from these responses were: the need for urgent action to improve mental health outcomes due to industry stressors; the critical role that mental health education plays in overall wellbeing; the need to embed wellbeing strategies into professional practice and policy; and the desire for ongoing, tailored mental health supports.

These themes are explored in the following recommendations.



Entertainment industry professionals desire urgent action to improve mental health outcomes for people working in the industry.

One of the key themes emerging from this research was a sense of urgency. With research now painting a clearer picture of the challenges faced by entertainment industry professionals, more than ever, the industry wants real change. This urgency was particularly expressed with regard to addressing stigma, providing safe and supportive spaces to connect and to challenge/report unsupportive attitudes and behaviours, increasing supports and access to services, and addressing work conditions that pose psychological risk.

How can we act with urgency?

Can act immediately by...

Individuals working in the entertainment industry



...Raising their concerns with employers, training institutions, peak bodies and government; connecting with peers and creating conversation about the issues; fostering an environment for change and unity toward action.

As an example, the Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment (AAWE) is a cross-sector peer-to-peer initiative for shared interest in positive mental health and wellbeing behaviours for a sustainable Australian entertainment industry. The Alliance is free to join and encourages participation and sharing of knowledge and stories.
www.entertainmentassist.org.au/join-aaawe#join

Unions, guilds and other peak industry bodies



...Ensuring that they are representing the collective concerns of entertainment industry professionals and advocating for increased support, services and training.

Employers



...Reviewing current work practices and behaviours that may negatively impact on employee mental health and wellbeing, and being open and amenable to education and change.

Education and training institutions and professional networks



...Reviewing curricula to incorporate education around mental health and wellbeing, including help-seeking and self-care.

Government



...Reviewing arts and workplace funding and policy to ensure that the wellbeing concerns of the entertainment industry workforce are recognised and supported.

Improved mental health education for entertainment industry professionals is crucial to overall wellbeing.

Industry professionals have expressed a need for free (or minimal cost), regular, targeted training in wellbeing. Priority content includes information on mental health and ill-health, alcohol and other substances and industry-specific risk factors. Other recommended topics are: available support services and how to access them; conversation training; upskilling individuals to initiate discussion and respond to concerns in a constructive manner, such as via participant-based practice; and peer-to-peer learning as well as self-care strategies.

How can we improve education and training?

Can act immediately by...

Individuals



...Participating in education and training activities and programs that enable and support improved mental health outcomes for the entertainment industry.

Unions, guilds and other peak industry bodies



...Ensuring that education and training on wellbeing is available, accessible and relevant to those they represent.

Employers



...Incorporating and facilitating access to relevant education and training in mental wellbeing for employees.

... Increasing their own skills and knowledge in mental wellbeing and employee support.

Education and training institutions and professional networks



...Increasing, improving and tailoring current programs in mental wellbeing, throughout the education timeline and into the workforce.

Government



...Providing continued funding and policy to ensure that people working in the entertainment industry are receiving appropriate education in mental wellbeing.

Wellbeing strategies should be embedded into professional entertainment practice and policy, to identify and reduce risk.

Entertainment industry professionals want to see actions that reduce psychological risk in the workplace. This aligns with a general need to increase capacity at all levels of the industry (including government) to fulfil duty of care to support mental health and wellbeing for industry professionals.

How can we better identify and reduce risk?

Can act immediately by...

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| Individuals |  | ...Participating in workplace activities and programs that enable and support improved mental health outcomes for the entertainment industry. |
| Unions, guilds and other peak industry bodies |  | ...Updating policies and mandating action to reduce psychological risk in the workplace.

...Acting on behalf of industry professionals to address negative workplace culture such as bullying, harassment and discrimination; and problematic work conditions such as insufficient leave, unfair pay and unhealthy work hours. |
| Employers |  | ...Establishing and maintaining support networks on the road and developing standards around tour accommodation and other working conditions that may impact on wellbeing.

...Providing appropriate support for workers in high risk roles or with particular vulnerabilities, including those with lived experience.

...Adapting induction processes for new and casual staff that includes a mental health component.




...Scheduling regular debriefings to encourage conversations about mental health and wellbeing. |
| Education and training institutions and professional networks |  | ...Providing training for future professionals on how to challenge unsupportive industry culture and behaviours, including stigma around mental ill-health. |
| Government |  | ...Providing continued funding and policy to ensure that people working in the entertainment industry are psychologically safe at work. |

There is a strong desire for ongoing, tailored wellbeing supports for entertainment industry professionals.

People working in entertainment prefer supports that address industry-specific risks, that are provided within education/training or workplaces (or easy-to-access external services), and that are free or low cost. Such supports should be backed by associations, employers, training institutions and professional networks. They should challenge negative workplace culture, decrease stigma around help-seeking (through awareness-raising and mental health literacy) and improve options for peer support. At an advocacy level, government and peak bodies have a role in upskilling ‘first responders’ to mental health concerns such as families, friends, peers and GPs on the specific challenges faced by entertainment industry professionals.

How can we ensure appropriate and relevant support is available?

Can act immediately by...

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| Individuals |  | ...Accessing and using supports and programs that are designed to improve mental health outcomes for the entertainment industry, as they become available. |
| Unions, guilds and other peak industry bodies |  | ...Ensuring that tailored supports are available, accessible and relevant. |
| Employers | | ...Facilitating and promoting peer support networks, community hubs and other ‘safe spaces’. |
| Education and training institutions and professional networks | | ...Contributing to advocacy and stigma reduction, in order to increase help-seeking. |
| Government |  | ...Providing continued funding and policy to ensure that ‘first responders’ to mental health concerns (e.g. friends, families, peers and GPs) have the capacity to help navigate entertainment industry professionals toward appropriate supports. |

Acknowledgements

This report represents the culmination of three key research activities driven by **Everymind** and Entertainment Assist with the support of The Prevention Hub and the Australian Alliance for Wellness in Entertainment (AAWE). We especially acknowledge all of the entertainment industry professionals who took time to participate in the consultations and share their knowledge, experience and expertise.

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72 Watt Street (PO Box 833)
Newcastle NSW 2300

+61 2 4924 6900

everymind@health.nsw.gov.au
everymind.org.au

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