

Statement from Prof. Patrick McGorry, Professor of Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne and Director of Orygen Youth Health Research Centre.

Activate Arts Therapists: Support for Mental Health

I respectfully urge the Victorian government to expand its definition of "Mental Health Practitioner" to include "Professional Arts Therapists".

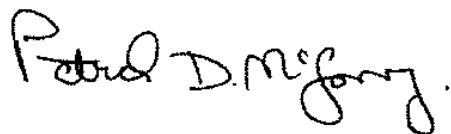
I welcome the additional funding for mental health committed in recent weeks. This recognises the immediate mental health impacts of the pandemic and the economic recession that will follow. However, without workers, the demand for mental health services will continue to outstrip what we can supply. Professional Arts Therapists are a trained, specialist workforce who are ready and waiting to help our communities with mental health prevention, care and recovery.

Last year's World Health Organisation (WHO) report confirms that the arts and arts therapies are effective for helping people experiencing mental distress and promoting health and well-being at all stages of the life course.

The Arts in all their forms - music, visual arts, drama, dance, poetry, digital media - have been essential to keeping us all going during the pandemic. For many people struggling with their mental health, Arts Therapy provides opportunities for help-seeking and engagement that offer something different to traditional talking therapies. It is a mental health promotion activity as well as a therapeutic exercise.

I have seen many Professional Arts Therapists work within youth mental health care and also in refugee mental health and it is time to expand access to this support. Many states and territories already recognise the benefits of Professional Arts Therapy and Victoria should do the same.

Arts Therapists can also play a role in the new Mental Health Practitioner in Schools program. It is a lateral solution to a very real need. They are essential allies in the Mental Health workforce and have the skills and training to address this major threat to mental health in our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick D. McGorry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Professor Patrick McGorry AO MD PhD FRCP FRANZCP