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Statement from Jill Gallagher AO, CEO of Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and former Treaty Advancement Commissioner for Victoria.

Activate Arts Therapists: Support for Mental Health

I support this campaign to change the Mental Health Act in Victoria to expand the definition of mental health practitioner to include Professional Arts Therapists. I believe this would allow the Aboriginal Community to have access to another form of therapy that is more in line with our culture.

I am confident that would help many of our young ones, and our older ones for that matter too, seek help much earlier.

This year has had a devastating impact on mental health in our communities. We survived the bushfires and COVID-19 hit. Almost everybody is affected in some way but for people already struggling with underlying issues the stakes are high.

Aboriginal organisations and communities have done a really great job working together, trying to keep our people safe. However, we can already see there are both short term and longer-term impacts on our health and wellbeing and we need to start changing things now.

As Aboriginal people we have long understood the benefits of storytelling and meaning making through our art forms. We have a deep cultural connection with our art and that this offers unique opportunities for our healing and recovery. Therefore, to have access to both Active Arts Therapist, the talking therapies and the other allied health professions would be of great benefit to the Victorian Aboriginal Community.

I would love to see our young people able to see an Arts Therapist in schools. Before 2020, of course, many of our young ones were already struggling with their mental health and/or caring for someone else experiencing trauma/mental illness. Taking the first step to seek support can be difficult and we already know that using arts as a vehicle can and does help.

I would also love to see more healing through art available across the lifespan, in mainstream services and in funded allied health supports as well as in our own communities and cultural programs. We can then build stronger pathways for Aboriginal people to train and find employment as Arts Therapists themselves.

Activating Arts Therapists to fill mental health jobs in schools and other settings is an important campaign and I support it wholeheartedly. Let's get this done.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Gallagher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jill" being more prominent than the last name "Gallagher".

Jill Gallagher AO
Chief Executive Officer