

# Advocating the mental health of Australian Entertainment Industry Workers

Inquiry into the Australian film and television industry  
Submission 23



Submission to: The House Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts inquiry into:  
**Factors contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Australian film and television industry**

By: Entertainment Assist

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## Overview

As a result of its research<sup>1</sup>, Entertainment Assist is aware of the mental health and wellbeing deficit in the Australian entertainment sector which includes the film and television industry. From the competition for roles, pressures of tight budgets and inconsistent work hours, to the repetitive process of editing distressing television news footage so that it is suitable for general broadcast, the film and television industry demands an unusually high level of resilience from its participants.

A sustainable Australian film and television industry relies upon an ecology of participants who can make art *and* commerce; appeal to audiences across cultures. Sustaining and enabling the long-term commitment and careers of its participants so that they can continue to contribute their creativity, technical skills and industry experience requires a change in workplace behaviours.

A sustainable film and television industry is one that retains talent and embeds resilient behaviours so that individuals are equipped to cope with the structural financial and other challenges of a career in film and television.

In support of a sustainable industry, Entertainment Assist therefore recommends:

- inclusion of mental health and wellbeing training in the sector's educational institutions;
- embedding mental health and wellbeing awareness and engagement in workplace cultures;
- further research and development of industry-specific specialists who can inform programs to address negative behaviours such as bullying, harassment and substance abuse in workplaces; and
- enhancing, mapping and promoting use of existing resources to avoid duplication of effort while encouraging help seeking among individuals who need support that suits the way they work.

This submission is intended as an introduction to mental health and wellbeing in the Australian film and television industry and broad recommendations for change in education, training and workplace behaviours. For further information and detailed analysis see [Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report](#) published by Entertainment Assist & Victoria University, 2016.

A summary of findings is included at the end of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> van den Eynde, J, Fisher, A, & Sonn C 2016 *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report*, Entertainment Assist & Victoria University

## About Entertainment Assist

Entertainment Assist is a national health promotion charity that raises awareness about mental health and wellbeing in the Australian entertainment industry. We are committed to generational change so that over time:

- Creatives, management and technicians are educated to take care of their own mental wellbeing, support their peers and prioritise wellbeing; and
- Industry employers activate workplaces (whether project-based or ongoing) that prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of employees alongside other EHS values.

Entertainment Assist is committed to reducing the shockingly high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, isolation and other matters associated with working in the Australian entertainment industry. We are supported by the Pratt Foundation and Village Roadshow and governed by a Board of Directors lead by Chairman David Mann OAM.

## Research by Entertainment Assist

In October 2016, world-first research into the mental health and wellbeing of entertainment industry workers was published by Entertainment Assist and Victoria University. [\*Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report\*](#) (the Report) was co-authored by Dr Julie van den Eynde, Professor Adrian Fisher and Associate Professor Christopher Sonn and found that incidence of suicidality, anxiety and depression of those who work in the Australian creative and entertainment industries is significantly higher than general population norms.

The “findings strongly suggest the entertainment and cultural industry is in severe distress, and in urgent need of early prevention and intervention programs to reduce the impacts of those with health and wellbeing problems, and to prevent new occurrences”<sup>2</sup>.

Research was undertaken in a mixed methods approach, with Phase One consisting of qualitative, interview-based research and Phase Two a quantitative survey-based approach. In Phase One interviews were undertaken with people who work in live entertainment, film and television, grouped as follows:

- Performing artists – actors, singers etc;
- Industry support workers - includes media producers, film and video editors, program director, director, production assistants, video producer, film, television, radio and stage directors, technical director, make-up artist, director of photography, stage manager, designer and artistic director; and
- Technicians and road crew - broadcasting, film and recorded media equipment operators, includes sound technicians, camera operators, projectionist, light technicians, television equipment operators

Key findings from Phase One included:

- 25% of performers have attempted or considered suicide;
- Over a third of performing artists, 25% of industry support workers and most road and technical crew reported mental health problems;
- Few sector participants know how or where to seek support, nor do they know how to broach mental health with colleagues/peers about whom they may be concerned;
- On average, performing artists live much shorter lives than the rest of the Australian working community

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<sup>2</sup> *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report*, 2016, p. 1

## Research by Entertainment Assist continued...

Phase Two comprised an online survey. 2,904 respondents from a cross-section of industry participants provided 488,000 data points from the perspective of 30,000 years of collective working experience. The findings included:

- Support of Phase One findings on suicide - **suicide attempts** for Australian entertainment industry workers are **more than double** that of the general population. In the twelve months preceding the survey, Australian entertainment sector workers experienced suicide ideation 5-7 times more than the general population and 2-3 times more over a lifetime;
- Levels of **moderate to severe anxiety symptoms** are **10 times higher** in this demographic than in the general population;
- Levels of **depression symptoms** are **five times higher** in this demographic than in the general population; and
- High levels of drug and alcohol use - specifically alcohol (at 11-19 standard drinks in one day) is consumed at double the rate compared to the general population intake, meth/amphetamine use is 8 times greater, ecstasy use is 7 times greater, cocaine use is 12 times greater, marijuana use is 4 times greater, pain killers for non-medical reasons is 7 times greater and tranquillizers for non-medical reasons is 9 times greater than the general population<sup>3</sup>.

The causes of distress lie in a series of interconnected industry conditions:

- The deep passion for creative work combined with a scarcity of opportunities are linked both to extreme competition and to forbearance in project-based work cultures which are reported to be toxic and bruising, and feature widespread bullying, sexual assault, sexism and racism;
- The high incidence of shift work and the associated disruption of sleep<sup>4</sup>, healthy lifestyle choices and social support. Research respondents reported that their irregular work hours create difficulty keeping in contact with friends and finding time for their families;
- The prevalence of freelance/contract engagements lead to unpredictable income and working hours. This in turn results in financial stress, feast or famine workload and the consequent disruptions to stable social networks and family relationships; and
- A cycle of self-medication via legal and illegal substance abuse which provides short-term stress relief and social connection but results in negative longer term physical and mental health impacts.

## Recommendations for a Sustainable Australian Film Industry

### 1. Culture

It is recommended that cultural change is required to provide a more supportive environment and strengthen a supportive cultural work environment, particularly with the high levels of mental health problems, drug and alcohol use, and suicidality reported by so many respondents in the Report.

### 2. Sleep disturbances

Sleep and irregular work patterns will not change because of the very nature of the film and television industry but Entertainment Assist recommends development of interventions related to managing irregular sleep patterns and irregular work patterns while maintaining a solid family and social life.

<sup>3</sup> Data is compared to the general population in NDSHS, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Hillman, D. R. et al. 2006 find that sleep disturbances contribute to a range of social and health problems including work related injuries, depression and anxiety, motor vehicle accidents and health conditions like diabetes and hypertension

## Recommendations for a Sustainable Film Industry cont...

### 3. Social Support

Interviewees and respondents indicated that they did not know where to get support in the entertainment industry. Further, they commented on needing tailored support services: easily accessible, run by people who understand the creative industries, and anonymous. Also, it is recommended that social support should build on and strengthen existing services.

### 4. Drug and Alcohol Use

It is recommended that drug awareness strategies, harm minimisation programs, and support programs for those who are addicted are designed and delivered which target workers in the creative industries including film and television.

### 5. Mental Health

It is recommended that psychological and psychiatric services are identified who have specialist expertise and knowledge of the entertainment and creative industries. Links with these resources need to be developed, and targeted specialist interventions be promoted and readily available for worker and HR staff reference.

### 6. Suicidality

Data on risk factors<sup>5</sup> have implications for targeted early intervention and prevention programs. These risk factors should be addressed in any early intervention and prevention programs. Further, early intervention and prevention programs must be carefully targeted at particular groups in the entertainment industry. One size-fits-all approaches will be unsuccessful, and may be detrimental.

### 7. Curriculum development

Considering the increasing numbers of people entering cultural occupations and industries<sup>6</sup>, coupled with the high level of education the respondents have achieved, there is an opportunity to build modules into curriculum which covers areas like protective factors, identifying and strengthening social support networks, informing students of the pitfalls of working in the creative industries, identifying the resources available, and other self-protective strategies.

## Further Information

For further information regarding this submission, please contact:

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<sup>5</sup> Detailed in *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report 2016*

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Employment in Culture, Australia*. Cat 6273.0, p. 4

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011). Employment in Culture, Australia. Cat 6273.0. Canberra, Australia.

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NDSHS. ( 2013). National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report 2013. Drug statistics series no. 28. Cat. no. PHE 183. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Van den Eynde, J, Fisher, A, & Sonn C 2016 *Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report* Entertainment Assist & Victoria University available at <https://www.entertainmentassist.org.au/our-research/>

# Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report

A research project by Entertainment Assist in association with  
College of Arts, Victoria University, October 2016



## WHO PARTICIPATED:

- 2904 Respondents across all sectors of the Entertainment Industry from all States and Territories of Australia.

**Group 1: Performing Artists and Music Composers** (including musicians, radio presenters, actors, singers, entertainers or variety artists, dancers or choreographers, television presenters, composers, music professionals and music directors)

**Group 2: Performing Arts Support Workers** (including media producers, film and video editors, program director, director, production assistants, video producer, film, television and stage directors, technical director, make-up artist, director of photography, stage manager, venue managers and artistic directors)

**Group 3: Broadcasting, Film and Recorded Media Equipment Operators** (includes sound technicians, camera operators, projectionist, light technicians, television equipment operators, roadies, performing arts technicians)

## Key Findings

### CULTURE:

- The majority of Australian entertainment industry workers express an overwhelming passion for their creative work.
- There is a powerful, negative culture within the industry including a toxic, bruising work environment; extreme competition; bullying; sexual assault; sexism and racism.
- There are high levels of mental health problems and suicidality.

### INCOME:

- 35% of all Australian entertainment industry workers earn an annual industry income below \$20,000
- 63% of Performers, 28% of Support Workers and 20% of Technicians/Crew earn less than the Australian National Minimum Wage of \$34,112
- 72.5% of entertainment industry workers earn less than \$60K annually from the entertainment industry
- 65% have a combined income below \$60K from earning within and outside the entertainment industry
- 54.6% have been generating their primary income from the Entertainment Industry for 2-15 years.

### Income generated from within the entertainment industry

Group 1: Performers	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Singers	Other Perf Artists
Less than \$30,000 PA	75.4%	85%	76.5%	65.7%	60.4%
Less than \$60,000 PA	89%	96%	93.7%	85.1%	88.3%

Group 2: Support Workers	Stage Managers	Technical Directors	Other Perf Arts Support Workers
Less than \$30,000 PA	39.3%	12.4%	23.7%
Less than \$60,000 PA	78.6%	42.2%	68.3%

Group 3: Techs/Crew/Roadies	Lighting Technicians	Sound Technicians	Road Crew & Riggers
Less than \$30,000 PA	15.6%	30.4%	40.9%
Less than \$60,000 PA	62.4%	71%	81.8%

### Income generated from outside the entertainment industry

Group 1: Performers	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Singers	Other Perf Artists
No income from outside industry	12.5%	17.8%	24.2%	22.6%	27.9%
Less than \$20K from outside industry	41.4%	45.2%	31.6%	30.1%	37.2%
Less than \$30K from outside industry	73.2%	78.3%	68.7%	63.5%	86.7%

Group 2: Support Workers	Stage Managers	Technical Directors	Other Perf Arts Support Workers
No income from outside industry	54.8%	73.7%	60.1%
Less than \$20K from outside industry	33.3%	17.5%	26.6%

### Income generated from outside the entertainment industry continued...

<b>Group 3: Techs/Crew/Roadies</b>	<b>Lighting Technicians</b>	<b>Sound Technicians</b>	<b>Road Crew &amp; Riggers</b>
No income from outside industry	63.8%	55.7%	45.5%
Less than \$20K from outside industry	25.5%	22.8%	34.1%

### WORK & SLEEP PATTERNS:

#### Working unpredictable hours

- 43.1% of Entertainment Industry Workers work most of the time in the evenings and night
- 41.9% work on the weekends
- 30.2% always work unpredictable hours

This is well over general population shift work patterns where 16% of the general population are shift workers.

#### Sleep Disorders

- 44% of Entertainment Industry Workers don't get enough sleep
- 45.5% have disrupted sleep.
- 6% of the Australian population has a chronic sleep disorder. Thus, Entertainment Industry Workers suffer sleep disorders seven times greater than the general population.

#### Insomnia

- 16% of Entertainment Industry Workers suffer from insomnia which is three times greater than general population at 5.6%.

<b>Group 1: PERFORMERS who most of the time/always:</b>	<b>Actors</b>	<b>Dancers</b>	<b>Musicians</b>	<b>Singers</b>	<b>Other Performing Artists</b>
Work in the Evenings and Night	43.3%	65.5%	57.3%	61.2%	38.3%
Work on the Weekends	51.6%	75.2%	66.9%	61.2%	73.6%
Work Unpredictable Hours	55.3%	49.6%	60.6%	38.8%	58.8%
Don't get Enough Sleep	64.6%	75.2%	65.1%	53.8%	47%
Have Disrupted Sleep	60.9%	68.2%	64.7%	74.7%	53%
Suffer Insomnia	39.5%	51.7%	46.3%	41.8%	38.2%

<b>Group 2: SUPPORT WORKERS who most of the time/always:</b>	<b>Stage Managers</b>	<b>Technical Directors</b>	<b>Other Perf Arts Support Workers</b>
Work in the Evenings and Night	72.9%	59.6%	35.4%
Work on the Weekends	74.6%	63.8%	36.2%
Work Unpredictable Hours	72.9%	68.1%	48%
Don't get Enough Sleep	74.6%	74.5%	73.3%
Have Disrupted Sleep	78%	78.7%	69.3%
Suffer Insomnia	50.9%	55.3%	47.3%

<b>Group 3: TECHS/CREW/ROADIES who most of the time/always:</b>	<b>Lighting Technicians</b>	<b>Sound Technicians</b>	<b>Road Crew &amp; Riggers</b>
Work in the Evenings and Night	76.1%	78.5%	78.7%
Work on the Weekends	77%	81.8%	78.8%
Work Unpredictable Hours	77.1%	76%	78.8%
Don't get Enough Sleep	85.4%	76.8%	75.7%
Have Disrupted Sleep	60.6%	74.4%	84.4%
Suffer Insomnia	43.1%	53.7%	57.6%

#### Impact of irregular work patterns and sleep disorders

- 57.9% of Entertainment Industry Workers have problems finding time for their families,
- 63% have trouble maintaining a social life
- 45% have trouble keeping contact with their friends in the industry



## MENTAL HEALTH:

### Diagnosis of a Mental Health Disorder in their lifetime

- The most common mental health diagnoses reported across the three groups is depression followed by anxiety.
- 44% of industry workers have **moderate to severe anxiety**. This is **10 times higher than the general population**.
- The levels of **depression** symptoms are **five times higher than general population** scores.

	Group 1 (Performers)	Group 2 (Support Workers inc Directors, Producers, Stage Managers, Production Assistants, etc)	Group 3 (Technicians/Crew/ Roadies)
Diagnosed with a mental illness	40.8%	37.5%	31%
Diagnosis of more than one mental illness over a lifetime	34.6%	37.3%	39.8%

Group 1: PERFORMERS	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Singers	Variety Artists
Diagnosed with a mental illness	21.4%	12.9%	23.4%	21.4%	27.9%
Moderate to Severe Depression	53.5%	29.2%	54.1%	54.1%	67.4%
Moderate to Severe Anxiety	25.6%	25.3%	24.4%	19.4%	34.9%

Group 2: SUPPORT WORKERS	Stage Managers	Technical Directors	Other Perf Arts Support Workers
Diagnosed with a mental illness	17.4%	13.6%	28.5%
Moderate to Severe Depression	60.5%	67.8%	58.1%
Moderate to Severe Anxiety	26.7%	32.2%	25.1%

Group 3: TECHS/CREW/ROADIES	Lighting Technicians	Sound Technicians	Road Crew & Riggers
Diagnosed with a mental illness	20.1%	20.2%	24.4%
Moderate to Severe Depression	64.6%	63.8%	64.4%
Moderate to Severe Anxiety	39.6%	30.1%	31.3%

### Sought Professional Assistance for Mental Health Issues

- Overall 59.5% of entertainment industry workers have sought professional assistance for their mental health issues.

	Group 1 (Performers)	Group 2 (Support Workers)	Group 3 (Technicians/Crew/Roadies)
Sought professional assistance	65.2%	59.6%	45.2%

## SOCIAL SUPPORT AND NETWORKS:

- 59.9% of industry workers could not raise \$2000 from their networks in an emergency.
- 56.1% feel they either can not get help or only sometimes receive help from friends, family, neighbours and colleagues when in need.

Most entertainment industry workers do not know where to get support from in the entertainment industry and identify critical barriers to seeking support including:

- lack of resources such as time, money and lack of good support resources;
- problems inherent in the industry such as lack of trust, unsupportive environment, disjointed lifestyle, lack of respect for industry from outside;
- a perception that seeking support may compromise future employment opportunities.

Group 1: PERFORMERS	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Singers	Variety Artists
Cannot raise \$2K in an emergency	60%	79.1%	60.5%	51.7%	46.7%
Feel they can not garner support from friends, family or colleagues	49.4%	57.1%	49%	47.5%	56.6%
Do not know where to find support within the industry	48%	46.2%	51.4%	50.7%	38.2%



## SOCIAL SUPPORT AND NETWORKS continued...

Group 2: SUPPORT WORKERS	Stage Managers	Technical Directors	Other Perf Arts Support Workers
Cannot raise \$2K in an emergency	55.2%	54.6%	47.5%
Feel they can not garner support from friends, family or colleagues	51.7%	63.6%	58.4%
Do not know where to find support within the industry	57.7%	48.9%	52.7%

Group 3: TECHS/CREW/ROADIES	Lighting Technicians	Sound Technicians	Road Crew & Riggers
Cannot raise \$2K in an emergency	56%	69.3%	81.8%
Feel they can not garner support from friends, family or colleagues	63.3%	65.2%	72.7%
Do not know where to find support within the industry	52.3%	62.8%	54.5%

## SUICIDE:

### Suicide Ideation and Planning

- **Suicide attempts** for Australian Entertainment Industry workers are **more than double** that of the general population.
- In the last twelve months **Road Crew members** experienced **suicide ideation almost 9 times more** than general population.
- In the last twelve months Australian Entertainment Industry Workers experience **suicide ideation from 5-7 times more** than the general population and 2-3 times more over a lifetime.
- **Suicide planning** for Australian Entertainment Industry workers is **4-5 times more** than general population.

### Suicidal Ideation Responses - GROUP

	Group 1 (Performers)	Group 2 (Support Workers)	Group 3 (Technicians/ Crew/Roadies)	All Groups	General Population (Johnston et al, 2009)	Entertainment Industry Rate compared to General Population
Suicide Ideation in the last 12 months	13.1%	15.6%	19.1%	14.8%	2.3%	6 times greater
Suicide Ideation in their Lifetime	26.4%	31%	33.6%	28.9%	13.3%	More than double
Suicide Planning	16.0%	17.5%	19.9%	17.4%	4.0%	4-5 times greater
Suicide Attempts	7.4%	7.9%	8.5%	7.7%	3.2%	More than double

### Suicide Ideation responses – PERFORMERS

	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Singers	General Population (Johnston et al, 2009)
Suicide Ideation in the last 12 months	14.9%	7.1%	15.3%	12.2%	2.3%
Suicide Ideation in their Lifetime	30.2%	15.7%	30.0%	22.4%	13.3%
Suicide Planning	18.1%	8.6%	18.4%	16.6%	4.0%
Suicide Attempts	8.0%	3.7%	7.5%	10.2%	3.2%

### Suicide Ideation responses – TECHNICAL and SUPPORT

	Road Crew	Lighting Techs	Sound Techs	'Other' Support Workers	General Population (Johnston et al, 2009)
Suicide Ideation in the last 12 months	20.0%	18.8%	19.0%	16.8%	2.3%
Suicide Ideation in their Lifetime	35.6%	29.9%	33.7%	33.0%	13.3%
Suicide Planning	17.8%	21.5%	17.8%	20.7%	4.0%
Suicide Attempts	4.4%	7.6%	8.6%	10.1%	3.2%