

The art of being mentally healthy

January 11 2016, by David Stacey

Researchers at The University of Western Australia have found that engagement in the arts for enjoyment, entertainment or as a hobby, for two or more hours a week, is associated with good mental wellbeing.

The award-winning study, published in *BMC Public Health*, is the first internationally to quantify the relationship between mental wellbeing and [arts](#) engagement in the general population.

Lead author Dr Christina Davies said good mental health was the foundation for individual and community wellbeing, yet every year one in five Australians experience mental illness.

"People need a range of easy enjoyable options they can use to stay well," she said.

"Depending on a person's interests, the arts can provide a range of health enhancing opportunities, activities and events."

Dr Davies said whether a person preferred listening to music, reading, colouring, creative writing, watching movies or attending concerts, the knowledge that arts engagement positively impacts mental wellbeing was empowering.

"Arts engagement increases happiness, confidence, self-esteem and reduces stress and social isolation," she said.

"It results in the creation of good memories and has an impact on a

person's knowledge and skills.

"People need to give themselves permission to be creative and to make time for the arts activities and events that they enjoy."

Dr Davies said the study, which won a Department of Health Future Health WA Award, the Public Health Association (WA) Post Graduate Award and the Arts and Health Australia Award for Excellence, provided new insights into the relationship between the arts and population health.

The ground-breaking research forms part of Dr Davies "Healthy Arts" PhD. The study was funded by Healthway and the Department of Health WA. Her PhD supervisors and co-authors were Professor Matthew Knuiman and Associate Professor Michael Rosenberg, senior academics in [health](#) promotion and [public health](#).

More information: Christina Davies et al. The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population, *BMC Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-015-2672-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2672-7)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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