



THE BIG ANXIETY FESTIVAL

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The Big Anxiety Festival, the world's largest mental health and arts festival, has announced their full 2019 program designed to embrace diverse experiences across the vast spectrum of mental health by focusing on one central challenge; how do we cultivate empathy in place of stigma, fear and discrimination?

With 65% of Australians having a mental health problem failing to seek help, The Big Anxiety Festival's national and cultural importance is significant in both creating discussions around Empathy and Stigma; Care and Healing; and Suicide Prevention while providing innovative, engaging and practical tools to encourage Australians to seek help.

Working with partners such as Lifeline and The Black Dog Institute, the 2019 program has been curated to find new and groundbreaking ways of reaching and engaging people of all ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds and beliefs to promote important discussions around suicide and mental health to improve our capacity to take care of ourselves and others.

Professor Jill Bennett, Artistic Director of the Festival said, "The arts are the best means we have for sharing complex experiences. They show us what we don't know about ourselves and others. They shine light on the relationships and social settings that help or hinder mental health, and they are a means to transform those relationships.

"The six-week Festival, spanning mental health month (October) uses 62 projects, 25 venues, 9 exhibitions and 8 Ambassadors, across multiple creative platforms including immersive media, visual art, conversation, film, multi-media, performance, poetry, song, and virtual reality to explore various ways for us to connect, hear and be heard; and to make change by breaking down barriers people experience and through building better futures," she said.

Combining art and science to promote empathy and reduce stigma, The Empathy Clinic and its innovative app Course of Empathy explores perspective shifting as a pre-condition of empathy through a combination of virtual reality and encouraging self-reflection through a range of follow-up tools and resources.

Awkward Conversations offers a series of one-to-one conversations in experimental formats, tackling anxieties, habits and hard-to-talk-about subjects like mental health. The S Word, a free special event held on World Mental Health Day 10 October at Tallawoladah Lawn (outside MCA), will present Lifeline's crisis support team hosting one-to-one informal conversations in addressing anything people want to ask about suicide and mental distress.

Dr Anna Brooks, National Manager, Lifeline Research Foundation said, "Using art to promote engagement with mental health, The Big Anxiety Festival offers an unprecedented opportunity to shine a light on the work of Lifeline's crisis supporters to help reduce stigma by bringing essential conversations about suicide out of the shadows and into the light."

The Edge of The Present, an imaginative use of technology in suicide prevention melds art with science to create an immersive VR environment that

literally cultivates the capacity for future thinking and is inspired by suicide survivors and neuropsychological research.

The Visit, part of the fEEL Lab also uses technology creatively through an intimate interactive engagement to promote understanding of the lived experience of dementia.

Festival Ambassador and poet, Omar Sakr, Artist Cameron Cripps-Kennedy and students of Bradfield College stage poetic conversations across the external walls of buildings in St Leonards in These Walls Could Talk to bring conversations about mental health into the public realm, reflecting on the possibilities for creating living and working environments conducive to better mental health.

Acclaimed British novelist and former mental health nurse, Nathan Filer will argue in The Language of Madness - The Big Anxiety Prize that it is time to re-imagine care, rethink mental health labels and anti-stigma campaigns. The Big Anxiety Prize is awarded to a creative thinker advancing the discussion of mental health.

Uti Kulintjaku (UK) Initiative is part of The Empathy Clinic and is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project providing cultural resources to support mental health in remote communities. The UK initiative works at the interface of knowledge systems and languages to better understand mental health.

Drawing on real-life stories, The 12 songs of Daughters are emblematic of a global crisis that affects one in three women in their lifetime by following a powerful journey tracing the effects of gender violence to evoke the strength and tragedy of women and girls lost to violence.

The Anxiety, Culture And The Future Conference, a three-day conference, will bring together international and national thinkers to explore new ways to imagine the future through workshops and presentations that focus on the practical question of how we generate individual and collective responses to address anxieties, loss of hope and the general failure of future thinking. The conference is open to everyone.

Winner of the Best New Event at the Australian Event Awards 2018, The Big Anxiety Festival is a world leading initiative of UNSW Sydney in association with the Black Dog Institute with more than 25 partnerships across mental health and community organisations including remote communities as well as leading arts and community venues.

Most events at The Big Anxiety Festival are FREE or Low Cost. Venue numbers are limited, so advanced booking will guarantee participation.

For more information visit:

www.thebiganxiety.org

[facebook.com/thebiganxiety](https://www.facebook.com/thebiganxiety) | twitter.com/thebiganxiety | [Instagram.com/thebiganxiety](https://www.instagram.com/thebiganxiety)

#BigAnxiety #MentalHealth #TBAF

Media Centre: Background information, images, biographies of key personnel and the full program can be accessed at:
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/83sb267ma5n67wx/AADHeeRI9bdPcfaYI6x31p9na?dl=0>

For further media enquiries only contact:

Bruce Pollack, Pollack Consulting (02) 9331 5276 or Alice Collins, Insight Communications, (02) 9518 4744

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

AMBASSADORS

John A Douglas, Sonakshi Babbar, Sandra Pankhurst, Will Centurian, Nat's What I Reckon, Evelyn Araluen, Honor Eastly & Omar Sakr.

NATHAN FILER (UK)

23 Oct, 6.30pm, Lower Ground Floor, City of Sydney Town Hall

The acclaimed British novelist and former mental health nurse argues that it is time to re-imagine care, rethink mental health labels and anti-stigma campaigns.

THE EMPATHY CLINIC

27 Sept- 16 Nov, Tues-Sat 10am-5pm, UNSW Galleries

Unless we can imaginatively 'step into someone else's shoes' we cannot empathise. The Empathy Clinic sets out to provide the practical tools, techniques and insights we need to become more empathetic. A unique set of rooms, installations and virtual reality tools by international and Australian artists will enable visitors to shift perspectives, gain insight into other minds and diverse forms of empathy, and undertake 'empathy training' with measurable results.

THE S-WORD - AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS WITH LIFELINE

10 October, Tallawoladah Lawn, near MCA, The Rocks

In an event for World Mental Health Day, Lifeline's crisis support team host one-to-one informal conversations addressing anything you want to ask about suicide and mental distress.

DAUGHTERS

17 Oct, 6.30pm Panel Talk with 8pm Concert, City Recital Hall, Angel Place

Daughters is a world premiere song-cycle by librettist Tammy Brennan and composer David Chisholm that uses the haunting form of Portuguese fado, to follow a powerful journey tracing the effects of gender violence.

THESE WALLS COULD TALK

27 Sept - 3 Nov, Bradfield TAFE; also Chandos St & Atchison Lane, St Leonards

Artist Cameron Cripps-Kennedy, poet Omar Sakr and students of Bradfield College stage poetic conversations across the external walls of buildings in St Leonards.

UTI KULINTJAKU INITIATIVE - NEW VIRTUAL REALITY WORKS

UNSW Galleries, see The Empathy Clinic, 27 Sept - 16 Nov and Art After Hours, AGNSW, 16 Oct

The Uti Kulintjaku [UK] initiative is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project that takes its name from a Pitjantjatjara phrase that means 'to think and understand clearly'. The UK initiative works at the interface of knowledge systems and languages to better understand mental health.

EDGE OF THE PRESENT

27 Sept-16 Nov, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm, UNSW Galleries

Edge of the Present is an immersive virtual reality environment that cultivates the capacity for future thinking. Inspired by suicide survivors and neuropsychological research, this exhibit is led by artist Alex Davies. Informed by cognitive neuropsychology as well as lived experience, Edge of the Present is a partnership with The Black Dog Institute and the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention, supported by NSW Minister for Mental Health.

Contacts

Alice Collins

0414 686 091

mailto: alice@insightcommunications.net.au

Bruce Pollack

02 9331 5276

mailto: bruce@pollackconsulting.com