

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## ART, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY COMBINE FORCES TO EXPLORE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE BIG ANXIETY FESTIVAL 2019 from 27 September to 3 November With New Funding from the Department of Health

The Big Anxiety Festival, the largest mental health and arts festival in the world, returns in 2019 after the success of the inaugural Festival in 2017.

The month-long biennial Sydney festival promotes mental health and wellbeing in exciting arts projects that combine science and creativity. Unlike any other arts festival, The Big Anxiety has a unique practical focus, harnessing creative expertise to improve our capacity to take care of ourselves and others.

In 2019 the Festival's focus is on Empathy and Stigma; Care and Healing; and Suicide Prevention.

Winner of the Best New Event at the Australian Event Awards 2018, the 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.

**Professor Jill Bennett, Artistic Director of the Festival** said “The arts are the best means we have for sharing complex experience. 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.

**Currently** 65% of Australians with a mental health problem don't seek help. **The Big Anxiety Festival's** mission is to engage that 65% – as well as all those who feel 'the system' doesn't yet deliver what we or our communities need. **The Festival** is about “finding ways to connect, to hear and be heard, and to make change – breaking down the barriers people experience and building better futures”.

**Professor Katherine Boydell**, the festival's **Mental Health lead at Black Dog Institute** says "Data from the 2017 festival shows how profound the health and wellbeing impact of art can be, influencing what visitors feel, think and do". As a result, both the **Federal and State Government Departments of Health are now supporting the festival** to develop even more innovative and targeted programs for 2019

**The 2017 Festival successes included:-**

- 140,000 Visitors
- 264,630 Website Views
- 75 Projects
- 32 Venues
- 200+ Artists and Presenters
- 270 Media Reports
- 100+ Volunteers
- 45 Partners
- 71 Free Events over 53 days
- 16 World Premieres
- 7 Festival Ambassadors

Already 4 major new Projects and a Conference have been announced for the Festival.

**Uti Kulintjaku**

The Uti Kulintjaku [UK] project of the NPY (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) Women's Council is an Anangu-led social innovation for systems of change that strengthen wellbeing, led by Ngangkari traditional healers and senior APY lands artists. In Pitjantjatjara, Uti Kulintjaku means 'to think and understand clearly'. The UK initiative works at the interface of knowledge systems and languages to better understand mental health. They are currently working on a new Virtual Reality project for The Big Anxiety Festival 2019.

**The Empathy Clinic**

Unless we can imaginatively 'step into someone else's shoes' we cannot empathise. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that we direct empathy to people we perceive to be 'like us'. Some of us make a conscious effort to overcome bias and stigma – but are we really comfortable with difference and diversity? This exhibition and program sets out to actively address the empathy problem. 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 Course on Empathy**

A purpose-built, app-based Course on Empathy has been designed to cultivate empathy by a research team of psychologists and artists from the Felt Experience & Empathy Lab [fEEL] -- a unique lab funded by an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship, awarded to Professor Bennett. Dr Natasha Ginnivan, psychologist in fEEL says "this is exciting new research with immediate benefits for the community".

## **Edge of the Present**

How do you imagine a future when you can't see it? Edge of The Present is an arts-science community project developed in workshops with young people who have experienced suicidal behaviour.

Edge of the Present is a multi-user, mixed reality environment. Visitors are able to transform the environment through their decisions, movements and interactions. The project encourages curiosity and productive ways to imagine the future and envision change. 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.

## **Anxiety, Culture and The Future – International Conference**

Thursday 17 – Saturday 19 October, UNSW Art & Design, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

This three-day conference brings 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. Confirmed keynote speakers include **Renata Salecl [Slovenia]**, Author of 'On Anxiety' and 'The Tyranny of Choice', and **Lynn Froggett [UK]**, an expert on the health and psychosocial impacts of art and culture.

**The Big Anxiety Festival** is pleased to announce that both **Bridging Hope Charity Foundation** and the **Neilson Foundation** have renewed their support for **The Big Anxiety Festival 2019**.

**Media please note** – in due course additional background information, images, biogs of key personnel and the full program can be accessed at –

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/83sb267ma5n67wx/AADHeeRI9bdPcfaYI6x31p9na?dl=0>

For more information visit

[www.thebiganxiety.org](http://www.thebiganxiety.org).

Report on 2017 Festival evaluation available upon request.

[www.facebook.com/thebiganxiety/](https://www.facebook.com/thebiganxiety/)

[twitter.com/thebiganxiety](https://twitter.com/thebiganxiety)

[www.instagram.com/thebiganxiety/](https://www.instagram.com/thebiganxiety/)

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