

Joint statement: Shared commitment to cultural change in the theatre sector

We pay our respects to the First Nations people of this land that we're meeting on.

Gathering on Wurundjeri land within the Kulin nation, the inaugural Safe Theatres Forum took place last weekend bringing together representatives from all areas of the not for profit spectrum of the performing arts industry. This historic and unprecedented forum is the culmination of over a year's work and was initiated by artists.

The 47 participants of the forum included culturally and gender diverse artists, LGBTIQ+ artists, First Nation artists, artists with disabilities, Artistic Directors and Executive Directors of major, small to medium and independent theatre companies, arts advocacy groups, funding bodies and representatives from the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, to initiate a national conversation and combine our collective effort in driving lasting cultural change to eliminate sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination in the sector.

The participants of the forum have agreed to be the custodians of change. They have made a long-term combined commitment to create workplaces free of harassment and bullying; workplaces that are safe, where policies and procedures are clearly communicated and understood, where avenues for complaint and redress are available which respect the rights of all parties involved.

The forum discussed the success of the theatre sector in changing the culture around the management of physical workplace health and safety and agreed that the lessons of this change provide confidence that a similar shift can be affected in the prevention of unwanted behaviours in the theatrical workplace.

As with all successful programs of cultural change, multiple initiatives will be required over the coming years, from strong and appropriate legislative frameworks; to a comprehensive, transparent and effectively utilised backbone of policy and procedure; to peer-to-peer campaigns that promote respect, inclusivity and responsibility and make these the accepted norms amongst theatre workers.

The participants have agreed to pool resources to galvanise the industry to establish safe workplaces free of harassment, bullying and discrimination. The participants will lead by example but are committed to sharing their resources, policies and knowledge to others working in live theatre.

The participants have agreed to several future steps which will shape a plan of work towards achieving safe theatre workplaces.

- The 12 theatre companies present at the forum will seek to harmonise their policies and procedures to create a common framework which can be adopted throughout the industry.
- All participants in the forum will make a commitment to the Live Performance Australia code of practice once it is finalised.
- Toolkits and resources for independent artists will be created so they understand their rights and avenues for action.

- Artistic Directors and Associates of the companies in attendance commit to undertake intimacy training to build skills in this area of creative practice.

The participants will make contact with other institutions within the sector to propose contributions that they might be able to make to ensure a coordinated program of action.

The participants will make a detailed statement about specific actions the groups will take in the near future.

The participants will hold state-based forums in the next three months, to share actions and commitments and to hear feedback from arts workers across the country.

The participants will reconvene in 12 months to report back on progress.

All participants agree the forum was a valuable opportunity to open new channels of communication, and lasting cultural change will need to be a managed process over time, but share a resolve to address harassment, discrimination and bullying in Australian theatres.

#safetheatres

Taking part in the Safe Theatres Forum were (in alphabetical order):

Zoe Angus (MEAA), Robyn Arthur (MEAA Equity), Michala Banas, Nicole Beyer (Theatre Network Australia), Annie Bourke (Malthouse Theatre), Loretta Busby (Ensemble Theatre), Elena Carapetis (State Theatre Company South Australia), Shareena Clanton, Elaine Crombie, Chloe Dallimore (MEAA Equity), Lisette Drew, Sue Donnelly (Belvoir), Peter Evans (Bell Shakespeare), Sharna Galvin, Jodi Glass (State Theatre Company South Australia), Ming-Zhu Hii, Kate Hood, Katherine Hoeppe (La Boite), Ann Johnson (Sydney Theatre Company), Amanda Jolly (Queensland Theatre), Sapidah Kian, Lee Lewis (Griffin Theatre Company), Eryn Jean Norvill (Safe Theatres Australia), Virginia Lovett (Melbourne Theatre Company), Sarah Neal (Malthouse Theatre), Annette Madden (Australia Council for the Arts), Patrick McIntyre (Sydney Theatre Company), Sarah McKenzie (MEAA Equity), Bruce Meagher (Griffin Theatre Company), Daniel Monks, Claire Nesbitt-Hawes (Ensemble Theatre), Lou Oppenheim (Circus Oz), Gill Perkins (Bell Shakespeare), Paige Rattray (Queensland Theatre), Karen Rodgers (Griffin Theatre Company), Sophie Ross (Safe Theatres Australia), Shari Sebbens, Brett Sheehy (Melbourne Theatre Company), Dan Spielman, Sam Strong (Queensland Theatre), Pearl Tan, Eva Tandy, Rob Tannion (Circus Oz), Anna Tregloan, Emma Valente, Clare Watson (Black Swan Theatre Company), Kip Williams (Sydney Theatre Company)