



## ASPAAH Mission statement

The Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare (ASPAAH) is committed to promoting holistic lifespan healthcare for performing artists. ASPAAH recognizes that all music performers young and old, amateur and professional, have unique needs that may not be met by standard models of health care. It also recognizes that health care practitioners involved in the care of musicians need to be provided with support and up-to-date educational resources.

## ASPAAH goals

ASPAAH promotes:

- Accessible high quality holistic health care for all performing artists
- Education for medical and other health practitioners; teachers, performers and students to improve health and well-being
- Research across disciplines relevant to this field
- A culture of lifelong preventative health care and safety practices
- Multidisciplinary discourse among health professionals, educators and performing artists
- Increased community awareness of performing arts healthcare

## ASPAAH STATEMENT on MUSICIANS' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

### Background to Statement

Data from both national and international surveys has established that musicians have a high risk of musculoskeletal injury, reported as 2-3 times higher than in other working populations

(<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20100925155000521>).

In a large orchestral survey in Australia, 84% of over 400 professional musicians report having suffered pain or injuries that have affected their playing (Ackermann, Kenny and Driscoll 2011). In this survey, about 50% of all participating performers across all instrumental groups had pain affecting performance at the time of playing. Similar rates of injury have been reported for marching bands, but research is lacking for other genres of musicians. Clinical evidence suggests similar levels of problems.



Of great concern is emerging data that performance-related issues are already prevalent in tertiary and school age players (Wijsman and Ackermann 2011; Ranelli, Straker and Smith 2008).

By far the largest cause of symptoms has been attributed to overuse of the body caused by long hours of playing or inadequate rest, or misuse of body structures related to poor posture or biomechanical flaws. There is no one simple issue that causes problems, it is more a combination of factors related to the characteristics of the performer themselves and the environment in which they practice and work. The awareness of injury risk and health promotion within these populations has been minimal or absent which is likely to explain why so many preventable injuries can occur.

## Major performance-related health issues

### *Musculoskeletal*

According to published literature, muscular injuries related to the overuse or misuse of certain muscle groups are the most commonly reported injuries. These are most common in the spine and arms, or in the face of brass players.

### *Neuromuscular*

Highly complex demands are placed on the neural system to co-ordinate the rapid and precise movements required for musical performance and auditory feedback as well as psychological processes. In some cases this can result in various degrees of coordination or biomechanical (body movement) dysfunctions.

### *Noise-induced hearing loss*

Musical practice and performance can easily exceed the recommended decibel levels of healthy noise exposure as can be seen by the indicative table below. Specialised earplugs are available from a qualified audiologist.

### *Psychological*

Due to the exposed nature of musical performance, regular public and professional scrutiny can make musicians prone to various stress or anxiety disorders. Musicians ideally need to develop strategies that enhance positive outcomes and help them to deal with the demands of their work.

## Current national guidelines (none are specific to musicians)

Guidelines for **noise exposure** are downloadable. An excellent UK-based guide on hearing safety has been developed specifically for musicians, available online at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/pdf/Safety-Musician\\_noise\\_guide\\_Part\\_1.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/pdf/Safety-Musician_noise_guide_Part_1.pdf)



With regard to **OHS/Musculoskeletal policy**, there are no existing specific policies in place for musicians, and as such generic OH&S guidelines are all that is available.

## Optimal performance and healthcare practices

(adapted from Performing Arts Medicine Association Music Position Statement)

Optimal performance is both the goal and reward of performing music. This is frequently impacted by performance injuries that, in many cases, are preventable. A holistic approach that encourages wellness and personal responsibility is an important component of optimal performance, injury prevention and injury minimisation.

Optimal performance, injury prevention and minimisation require:

- That the physical demands of playing do not exceed the body's capabilities and resources, strength, flexibility, coordination, endurance and conditioning.
- Appropriate extrinsic/environmental factors:  
Practice and performance space, seating, sound absorbent surfaces, lighting, and temperature can affect the physical health of musicians.
- Adequate psychological health:  
Performance anxiety and psychosocial stressors of developing and perfecting the musician's art can potentially adversely affect both students and professionals.
- Adequate access to health care providers:  
Musicians and teachers at all levels of training and performance need appropriate avenues to obtain skilled and appropriate medical care in a timely fashion.

**Music educators** are the primary channels for changing how music is taught and played. In the effort to promote optimal performance, reduce performance-related injuries and encourage good physical, auditory, and emotional health in their students, music educators need to become substantially involved in optimal performance and injury prevention. This may occur both by collaborating with professional healthcare providers as well as by teaching health-conscious music-related practices to students and their parents. Developing these practices, while a student, should then reduce injury risk as the musician ages.



## ASPAH Recommendations

(adapted from Performing Arts Medicine Association Music Position Statement)

1. Music organizations and schools should adopt a health promotion philosophy that affirms the goal of optimal performance to embrace healthy practice and performance habits:

The World Health Organization (WHO) was established in 1948 and defines *health* as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being, not just the absence of disease. The health promotion orientation grew out of the discoveries that show many factors such as social norms, cultural values and beliefs, perceived stress, quality of support, and environments play essential roles in the quality of a person's health.

2. Music schools should develop and offer an undergraduate "Occupational Health" unit of study for all higher education music courses:

Optimal performance education is the foundation for injury prevention. At a minimum, schools/departments of music should offer at least one introductory-level undergraduate course that covers the occupational health care related to music.

3. As part of helping students develop knowledge and skills in music, music educators should adopt the following practices:

- Arrange rehearsals and teach students how to practice in ways that are optimal for performance and minimize or avoid injuries. These strategies can include using appropriate warm-ups; breaking up intensive, repetitive practice sessions with short rest periods; and insisting on proper posture while playing or singing.
- Recognize that noise-induced hearing loss is a widespread and serious public health issue and that music is implicated as a causal factor. Music educators at all levels can contribute significantly to resolving this growing problem by addressing it in lesson plans and rehearsals and by controlling school-based lessons and rehearsals to reduce high volume levels for long durations.
- Actively monitor their students for incipient physical problems and insist that students adopt good practices to stop the development of severe problems.
- Incorporate including mental preparation exercises into regular warm-ups and cool-downs, to create ideal habits for optimal performance preparation that address the balance of levels of nervous activation.



4. Artistic directors, music administrators and management, human resource staff, and union officials should facilitate adequate access to medical care

All musicians need to know when and where to go for help. Performing musicians should have access to the same type of skilled care as do other students. Engagement of all stakeholders in achieving this goal for performers will provide greater efficiency and quality of their care.

5. Hearing protection should be worn in accordance with national guidelines and emerging information specifically for musicians.

6. Efforts should be made by music organizations working in the industry in schools to encourage healthy practices from the beginning of their training

*The Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare is here for you – artists, educators and health professionals – and we would appreciate your involvement. You can become a member and help encourage a proactive approach to health-care issues within your artistic community. Change begins with self-awareness so start to consider some of the issues that threaten the health and wellbeing of your artistic communities and become part of the groundswell that insists on the creation of a healthy and sustainable future for the arts in Australia.*