



Participate in the FEDEC Mental Health Survey!

School Year 2025-2026

Deadline to apply: June 24, 2025

Link to apply: [here](#)

Please note that a **preparatory meeting** will be organised after the deadline to discuss on the survey implementation according to the school's profiles and needs.



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01. What?

In the frame of the [Take Care](#) [1] project, FEDEC collaborates with the [Codarts research department](#) by launching a survey on the mental health of students in professional circus schools, during the scholar year 2025/2026.

Codarts Rotterdam University of the Arts developed the Performing Artist Health Monitor (PAHM), an online tool, that can be used to monitor the mental health. The PAHM consists of a recurrent online questionnaire that students fill out throughout the year. They can see the results of their questionnaire in their own online personal profile. This profile provides real-time information about their health and wellbeing, and both physical and mental capacities. Their profile also offers personalized recommendations for improving their health and performance.

The award-winning PAHM is part of an ongoing research initiative at Codarts, focused on preventing health issues like injuries and mental health challenges, while enhancing the overall physical and mental wellbeing of performing artists and to maximize their performance.

Data collected through PAHM may be used anonymously for research purposes, contributing to the development of interventions aimed at improving the physical and mental health of performing artists. Within the PAHM, students can choose to give consent to share their data anonymously.

FEDEC has organised an online info session with Rogier van Rijn from Codarts in March, which explains the process of this monitoring. If you didn't attend but are curious to learn more about their PAHM, [here is the link to the recording.](#)

The questionnaires **can be translated on request**, to foster the participation and comprehension for staff and students.

02. Who?

Every FEDEC school are eligible to participate (preparatory & higher education).

They can involve a few students (please note that participating students must be over 18) to take part in the monthly questionnaire or the whole school.

It is important that the involved students answer **every month**, that is why, in each school participating, one person is responsible for making sure this is done.

The objective being to guarantee continuity in data collection and to be able to understand the evolution of mental health over the course of the year.

03. When?

The self-monitoring questionnaire will be implemented **from September 2025 to June 2026** (to be defined more precisely with each participating school according to their own calendar).

A meeting will be organised beforehand with the schools to discuss the implementation of the survey.

[1] Take Care is the first-ever EU project dedicated to supporting mental health and well-being in the circus arts sector. It focuses on preventing mental health issues through raising awareness, providing training for students, staff, and professionals, facilitating the exchange of best practices in caring for young artists, monitoring students mental health.

Take Care is co-funded by the [Creative Europe](#) programme of the European Commission, and led by FEDEC - International network for professional circus education, in collaboration with 5 other partners. More info at www.fedec.eu/en/take-care.

04. Why?

Objectives

For the school:

- to better understand students' realities and foster their well-being,
- to improve students yearly schedule based on data,
- to avoid mental health issues and raise learning efficiency,
- to be more attractive to future students by making mental health a priority.

For the circus sector:

- to raise awareness and provide tangible data on mental health issues and their evolution in professional circus education,
- to collect figures,
- to recognize the specific needs and barriers of circus students/artists,
- to develop new tools, especially preventive ones.

For FEDEC (as a network):

- to create synergies between members and support them in their difficulties,
- to move the sector towards better management of these issues,
- to better defend the sector's interests at European political level.



The Codarts Research Department

The research group Arts & Wellbeing (formerly Performing Arts Medicine) started in 2015, and it is unique in the field of performing arts, because it uses a multidisciplinary approach by bringing together performing arts, sports, care, technology, and science. Its focus is on practice-oriented research into the physical and mental health of dancers, musicians, and circus artists, to prevent health complaints, improve health, and maximize performance. More than 1,000 national and international performing artists are monitored with the Performing Artist and Health Monitor (PAHM). On an international level, there is no other research group that collects health data in performing artists on such a large scale. The unique approach has led to studies that are published in the highest ranked peer-reviewed sport and performing arts journals.

This is possible thanks to experts.



Rogier M. van Rijn

Associate professor at Codarts,
Rotterdam (NLD)

Rogier M. van Rijn (PhD) is a Human Movement Scientist and Associate professor at Codarts University of the Arts, Rotterdam, the Netherlands at the Professorship Arts & Wellbeing. Besides, he is board member of the Performing artist and Athlete Research Lab (PEARL). His research focuses on optimizing the physical and mental health of performing artists (dancers, circus performers, musicians) and athletes with the aim to prevent health problems, optimize health and maximize performance. In 2010 he finished his PhD project with his dissertation "Acute ankle sprains in primary care" at the department of General Practice of Erasmus MC University Medical Center, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Until 2016 he held a Post-Doctoral Position at the Department of Public Health of Erasmus MC University Medical Center.



Janine Stubbe

Head of Codarts Research,
Rotterdam (NLD)

Janine conducts the professorship Arts & Wellbeing which focuses on physical and mental health in elite dancers, musicians, circus artists and athletes to enhance their performance. The professorship is unique in the field of performing arts, because it uses a transdisciplinary approach by bringing together performing arts, sport, medicine, technology and science. The focus of the professorship is on applied scientific research, which has led to strategic partnerships with dance companies, orchestras, circus festivals and sport teams. On an international level, there is no other research group that collects health data in performing artists and elite athletes on such a large scale. The unique approach has led to studies that are published in the highest ranked peer-reviewed sport and performing arts journals.

05. Need Analysis – Mental Health in the professional circus sector

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as following:

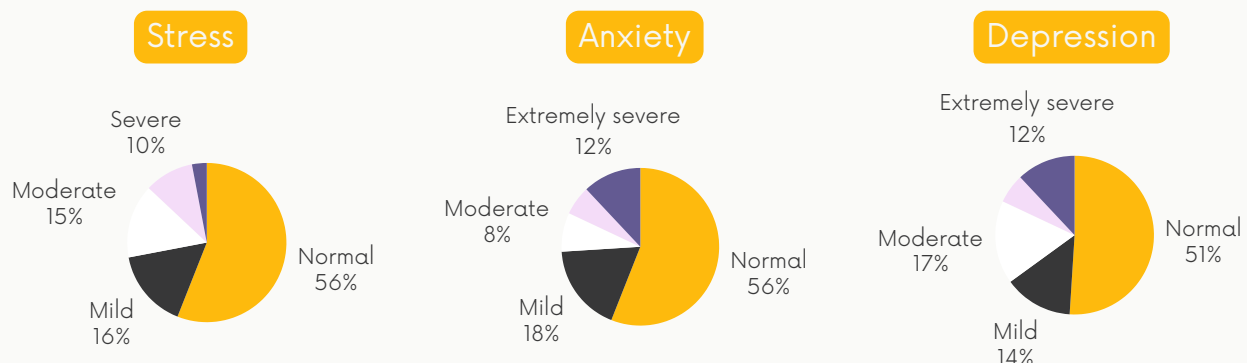
“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development. Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.”

According to this definition, mental health is not a universal reality but consists on a plurality of experiences and perceptions.

Fleur van Rens, an Australian researcher - Senior lecturer in sports psychology & Academic Chair of the Elite Athlete Program, at the Murdoch University (Perth, AUS) - conducted a “Big Mental Health of Circus Artists Survey” in early 2020, before COVID-19. She collected 500 answers from circus artists (professional & students) in the world. She concludes that even if circus arts “at a recreational level might be good for mental health (McGrath & Stevens, 2019; Stevens, McGrath, & Ward, 2019) [...] **circus artists experienced greater emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress, and significantly smaller levels of flourishing**”, in comparison with other studied population in the survey.

Emotional states of stress, anxiety, and depression among circus artists

Source: Psychology of sport and exercise



She also observed that younger circus artists were more vulnerable than the older ones. In addition, the transgender and gender diverse circus artists were especially at risk. In this study, the population of circus artists seem to have similar challenges as “professional athletes and other performing artists”. This in line with what the WHO affirmed in a report from 2012, demonstrating that young people “face many pressures and challenges, including growing academic expectations, changing social relationships with family and peers.” In addition, the COVID 19 add a greater impact on young people. According to the “Culture for Health report” (Culture Action Europe, 2022), young people between 15 and 24 years old are the most vulnerable target when talking about mental health. In 2022, their mental health problems have doubled since 2020. The report calls these issues, a “second but silent pandemic”. In her book, *Circus Psychology, An Applied Guide to Thriving Under the Big Top* (van Rens, 2023), Fleur van Rens explains the different issues observed in terms of mental health in circus professional sector (stress, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, ...) and its consequences on circus performances and individuals (injuries, lack of self-esteem, isolation, violence).

She observes that one of the obstacles when dealing with mental health issues, is the whole imaginary around mental care. Indeed, in the recognition process of mental health issues, could arise in students and professionals’ shame, discrimination, stigma, or isolation.

She also highlights that “(...)there is very little research that investigates the mental health of circus artists(...)”. This issue was underlined by Janine Stubbe of the Research Group Performing Arts Medicine of Codarts, for which the recentness and the lack of research on mental health in the circus professional sector is an obstacle to policy initiatives in the field.

The Take Care project aims to address the lack of data and evidence by fostering exchange of knowledge on mental health in the circus professional sector.

06. The questionnaire frame

The survey is still in the process to be adapted to the Take Care project: we need you to be able to finalize it. Based on existing questionnaire and the literature, Codarts identified some topics that are interesting to investigate, resulting in the following list:

- **Magnitude of mental health complaints:**
 - Type of complaints,
 - Contributing factors for complaints,
 - Perceived consequences of mental health complaints on participation & training volume,
 - Time-loss of circus activities due to mental complaints,
 - Medical attention,
 - Onset and duration of complaints.
- **Sleep:**
 - Quality and quantity,
 - Latency (difficulty falling asleep),
 - Wakefulness (how refreshed upon waking),

- Sleep challenge (perceived level of effort required to obtain good sleep),
 - Sleep management (degree to which student had difficulty managing their sleep).
- **Fatigue (overall mental and physical fatigue level)**
 - **Anxiety**
 - **Psychological wellbeing**
 - **Psychosocial resilience**
 - **Eating disorder:**
 - History of eating disorder,
 - Eating disorder risk.

Codarts would like to hear which topics the participating schools are interested in to investigate. This will be discussed in the preparatory meeting with voluntary schools, to gain some insight into what is currently relevant or important to schools in relation to this topic.

07. Questions (from members) and Answers (suggested by Codarts)

> How will the data be used during and after the collection of data (research, publications...)? for example, there could be 1 school per country and small classes in schools. It could then be easy to identify schools or students with the publication of data. How do we protect the anonymity?

Good question, we ensure that results are only presented on aggregated level, so they cannot be traced back to any individual. Moreover, if an article is written using data from students at the participating schools, we first present it to the schools for their approval prior to publication.

> What are the objectives of the survey?

The objective of the survey is to get insight in the extent and type of mental health issues in a circus education context.

> Responsibility: what to do if an event occurs (e.g. suicide) while data has been collected on the student's mental health?

Because we don't know which responses belong to which individuals, it's not possible to act based on the questionnaire results. Additionally, this is also not desirable, since it means that the results are not anonymous anymore. This may lead to biased results, as participants might not respond honestly if they feel their answers can be traced back to them.

> Will schools be supported on how to read the survey results and adapt solutions to it?

Yes, the schools will be supported on how to read the survey results. As part of the project workshops are offered on preventing mental health tissues in circus practices. In these workshops, participants collaboratively explore specific topics and learn how to implement new practices in taking care.

> How to communicate the process to students and staff to involve them?

As mentioned in the info session (March 21) there should be at least one member of the pedagogical team, the so-called implementation manager, be involved to ensure that the survey is completed monthly by the students, to guarantee continuity in data collection and to be able to understand the evolution of mental health over the course of the year. The communication towards students and staff is primarily the responsibility of this person. They will, of course, be provided with information from the project group.

> Is there a consent form to fill in?

Yes, when student's login for the first time they receive a consent form on which they can indicate if their data can be used for scientific purposes of this project yes/no.

Conclusion

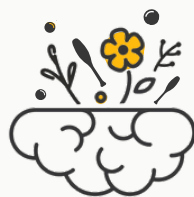
For schools willing to participate in the survey, there is plenty of flexibility so don't hesitate to join this experience!

Apply now

- Deadline to apply: [June 24, 2025](#)
- Link to apply: [here](#)

Do you have any questions?

Please contact Sarah at takecare@fedec.eu.



take care
circus life in a swing

www.fedec.eu/en/take-care