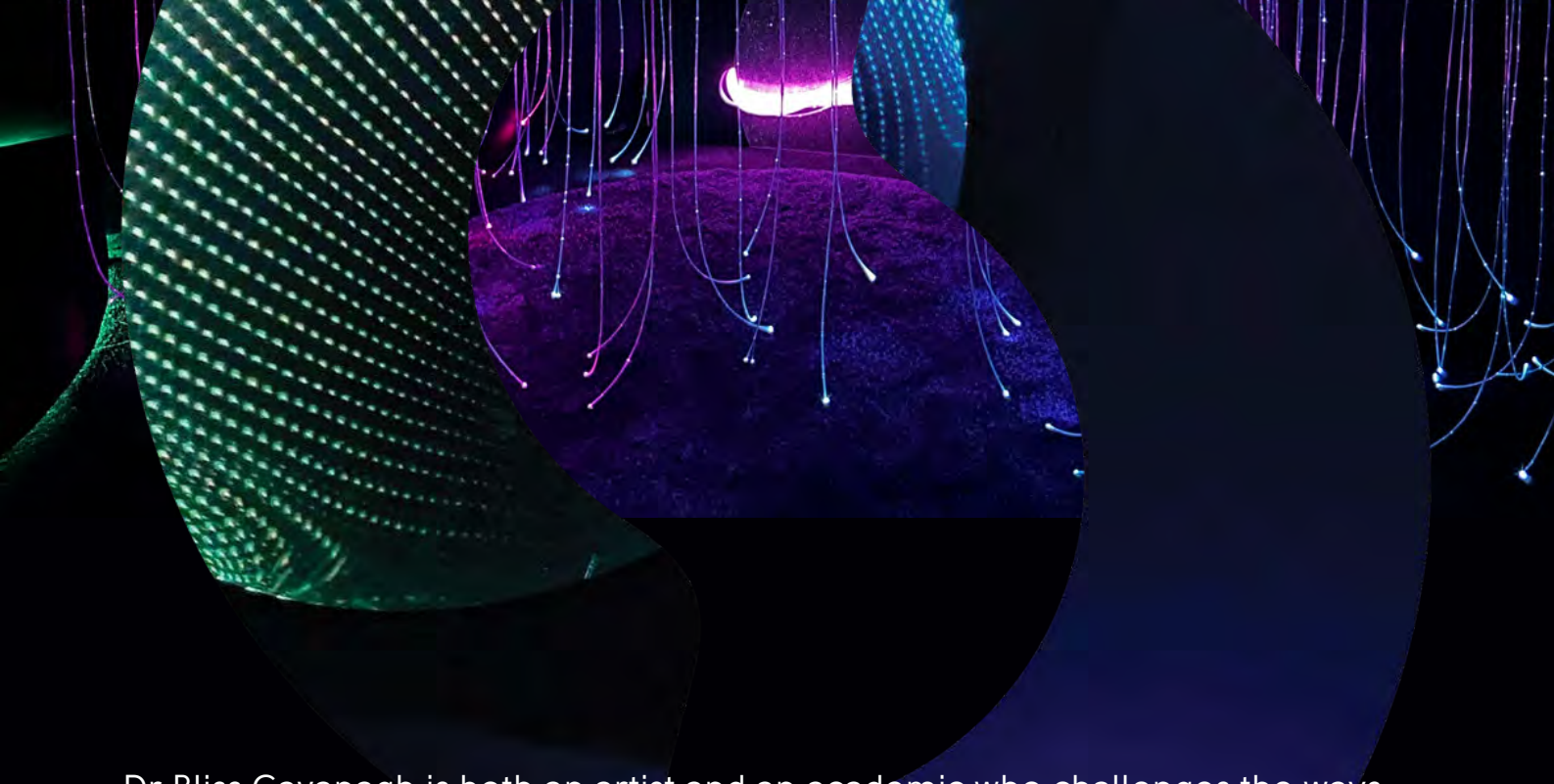
Creative
Sensory Spaces

Room to Reset

The benefits of sensory rooms

Dr Bliss Cavanagh



Dr Bliss Cavanagh is both an artist and an academic who challenges the ways our traditional built environment influences our experience of life. She is one of the world's leading experts in the design and benefits of sensory rooms.

As a university student, Bliss began creating sensory-based works to relieve her symptoms of Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder characterised by tics, which often triggers other conditions such as anxiety. Building her first multisensory environment had a profound impact on her life. She had never felt so calm and tic-free before.

But it wasn't just her. Others came to see the work – and their reactions were remarkable. That's when Bliss realised that she could design sensory spaces with an other-worldly, magical, 'wow' factor that helped both neurodivergent and neurotypical people. Indeed, she was so convinced that sensory rooms could benefit the general population that she decided to put her theory to the test by completing a PhD on the topic.

Bliss' PhD research investigated the health and wellbeing benefits of her innovative multisensory environments. It drew on the science and benefits of positive psychology, receptive arts engagement, restorative environments and multisensory interventions.

Published internationally, it proved the benefits of sensory spaces in the general population.

Since gaining her PhD, Bliss has worked on many major commissioned projects within mental health, disability, education, gallery and community settings to engage and resolve issues of accessibility, inclusivity, mental health and wellness.

In 2016, Bliss was selected as a Young Social Pioneer by the Foundation for Young Australians for her innovative work in this field.

Note **from the Author**

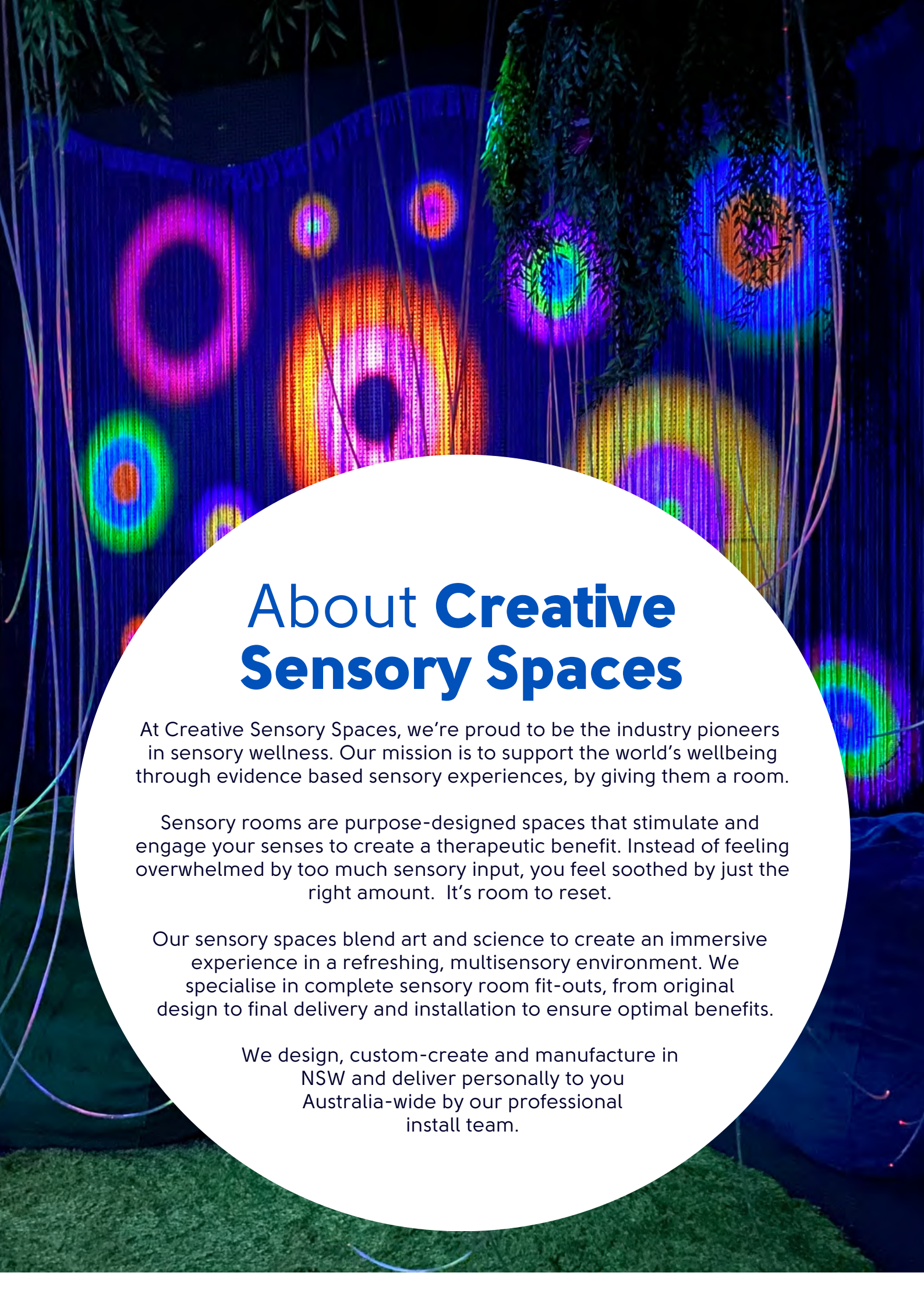
As the leading expert in the design and benefits of sensory rooms in Australia, I'm passionate about disseminating evidence-based research and making this information accessible to everyone.

In this guide, you will find a simple resource to cut through the jargon and share with you the facts about sensory rooms, their origins, where they're heading and examples of the populations they benefit based on evidence-based research studies.

This is just the beginning of a fascinating field that explores the senses and how we can purpose-create sensory experiences that provide a room to reset.

Let's dive in.

sensoryspaces.com.au



About **Creative Sensory Spaces**

At Creative Sensory Spaces, we're proud to be the industry pioneers in sensory wellness. Our mission is to support the world's wellbeing through evidence based sensory experiences, by giving them a room.

Sensory rooms are purpose-designed spaces that stimulate and engage your senses to create a therapeutic benefit. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by too much sensory input, you feel soothed by just the right amount. It's room to reset.

Our sensory spaces blend art and science to create an immersive experience in a refreshing, multisensory environment. We specialise in complete sensory room fit-outs, from original design to final delivery and installation to ensure optimal benefits.

We design, custom-create and manufacture in NSW and deliver personally to you Australia-wide by our professional install team.

Sensory rooms **for learning disabilities**

Studies exploring the benefits of sensory rooms with people with intellectual and learning disabilities report improved self-awareness, social behaviour, communication skills, and exploratory skills development (Haughton et al., 1998; Shapiro et al., 1997).

Sensory rooms **for autism**

Recognition for the potential of sensory rooms beyond recreation lead to their use in schools for children on the autism spectrum and more tailoring of the sensory input to the individuals needs to provide feelings of comfort, safety and relaxation, and enhance a sense of control and choice.

More commonly, sensory rooms are now used to assist the regulation of emotions, as well as the development of communication and social skills (Hurstwood & Smith, 1996).

Sensory rooms **for dementia**

Research has reported a reduction in feelings of sadness, fear and boredom and an increase in positive emotions or happiness, enjoyment and relaxation in people with dementia (Baker et al., 1997; Cox et al., 2004; Moffat, 1997).

Sensory rooms **for chronic pain**

Sensory rooms have demonstrated greater success in chronic pain management than traditional relaxation techniques as it reduced the patient's experience of pain, compared to the traditional relaxation methods used to reduce the unpleasant effects of pain (Schofield & Davis, 2000).

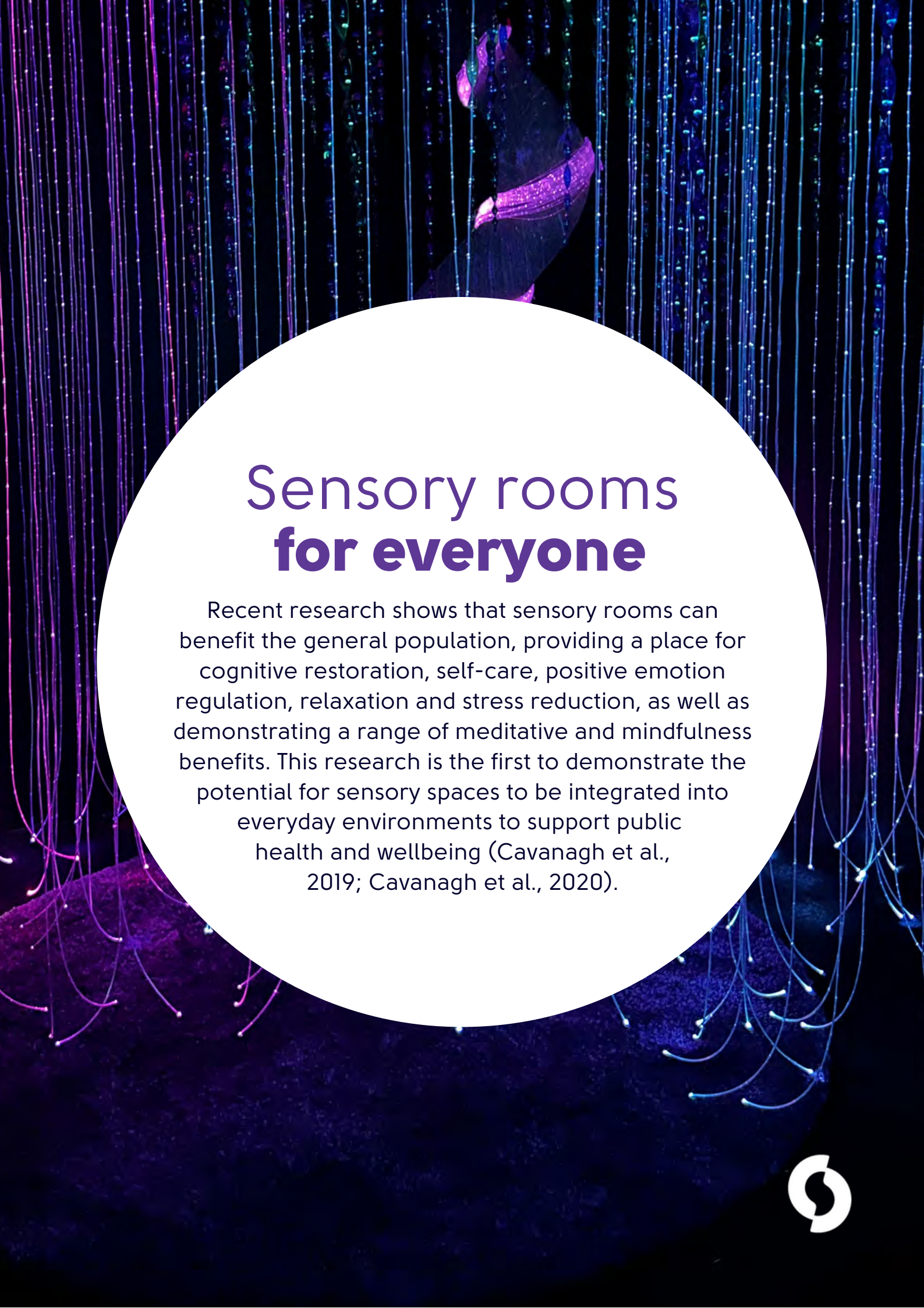
Sensory rooms **for maternal relaxation**

The benefits of sensory rooms have also been found for women when breastfeeding during their postnatal stay. Exhaustion and the emotional experience of caring for an unsettled baby can exacerbate maternal stress and anxiety. Sensory rooms have provided the dedicated space for relaxation needed to overcome these challenges (Hauck et al., 2008).

Sensory rooms **for mental health**

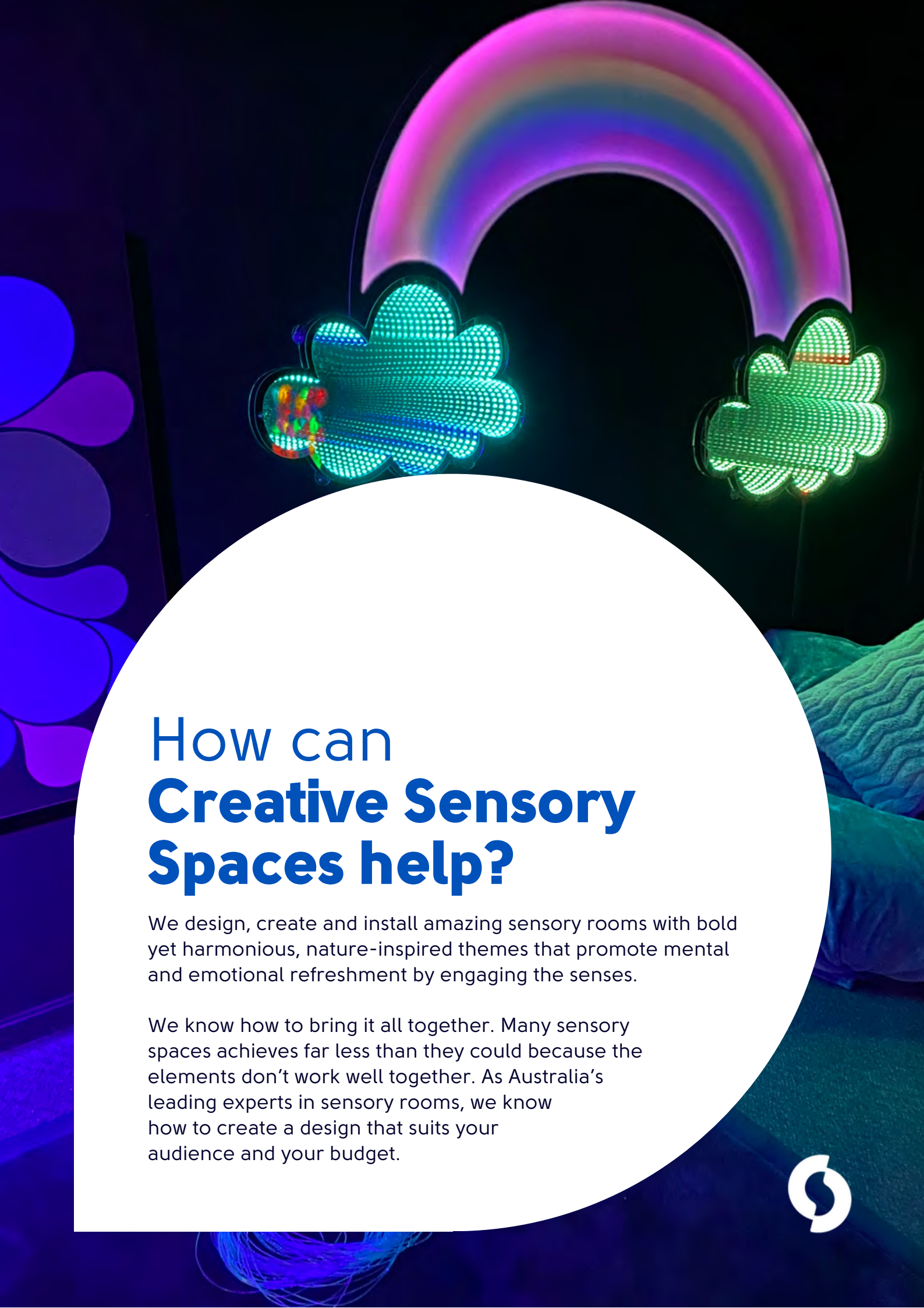
Sensory rooms have increasingly been installed in mental health settings with evidence for providing a place to relax, ease distress and to perform and develop self-organising and self-soothing routines.

Sensory rooms have become an important tool in reducing the use of seclusion and restraint practices in acute inpatient mental health facilities, providing a more person-centred and sensory supportive approach to treatment (Champagne & Stromberg, 2004; Lloyd et al., 2014, Novak et al., 2012).



Sensory rooms **for everyone**

Recent research shows that sensory rooms can benefit the general population, providing a place for cognitive restoration, self-care, positive emotion regulation, relaxation and stress reduction, as well as demonstrating a range of meditative and mindfulness benefits. This research is the first to demonstrate the potential for sensory spaces to be integrated into everyday environments to support public health and wellbeing (Cavanagh et al., 2019; Cavanagh et al., 2020).



How can **Creative Sensory Spaces help?**

We design, create and install amazing sensory rooms with bold yet harmonious, nature-inspired themes that promote mental and emotional refreshment by engaging the senses.

We know how to bring it all together. Many sensory spaces achieves far less than they could because the elements don't work well together. As Australia's leading experts in sensory rooms, we know how to create a design that suits your audience and your budget.

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Sensory Spaces

ROOM TO RESET

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