

**National Cultural Policy Submission**

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I welcome the renewed focus of Australia’s National Cultural Policy and its recognition that culture is not a luxury, but a public good. Culture shapes who we are, how we connect, and how resilient we become in times of social and economic uncertainty. For this policy to truly deliver longterm impact, however, it must be matched by sustained investment in music education - and arts education across all schools from the earliest of years.

Music education is one of the most accessible and effective cultural foundations we can provide to young people. Unlike many cultural initiatives that rely on participation later in life, schoolbased music education reaches children early, consistently, and regardless of background. When funding is uneven or dependent on a school’s postcode, cultural participation becomes inequitable. If we are serious about cultural inclusion, music education cannot remain optional or peripheral.

The case is especially compelling at a time when communities are facing increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and social disconnection. Music education does more than teach technical skills: it builds emotional literacy, discipline, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Ensemble work, in particular, teaches students how to listen, cooperate, and contribute to something larger than themselves—skills that directly support mental wellbeing and community resilience.

In my view, resilience is not only developed through clinical responses to mental illness, but through everyday experiences that foster connection and purpose. Music offers a nonverbal language for expressing emotion, processing stress, and building identity. For many young people, it provides a safe outlet where they feel seen, capable, and valued. These protective factors are critical in preventing mental health issues from escalating later in life.

Funding music education also strengthens the broader cultural ecosystem the National Cultural Policy seeks to support. Today’s students are tomorrow’s artists, audiences, technicians, educators, and cultural leaders. Without a strong base in schools, the professional music sector—and the cultural economy more broadly—will struggle to remain diverse, sustainable, and connected to the communities it serves.

Importantly, music education builds community resilience not just for individuals, but for families and neighbourhoods. School concerts, performances, and local collaborations bring people together, creating shared experiences and reinforcing social bonds. In times of crisis or uncertainty, communities with strong cultural participation are better equipped to adapt, support one another, and recover.

For the National Cultural Policy to achieve its ambition, it must treat music education as essential infrastructure, not an optional enrichment. That means stable, longterm funding; trained specialist teachers; and equitable access across public, regional, and disadvantaged schools. The return on this investment is profound: healthier individuals, stronger communities, and a more resilient cultural future.

Ultimately, funding music education in all schools is not just a cultural decision—it is a preventative health strategy, a social cohesion strategy, and a nationbuilding strategy. If we want communities that can withstand the pressures of increasing mental illness and social fragmentation, we must start by giving every child a voice, an instrument, and a place to belong.