

Federal Submission to the National Creative Arts Strategy

Embedding Psychosocial Safety, Access, and Income Stability in Australia's Creative Industries

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1. Executive Overview

This submission proposes that Australia's National Creative Arts Strategy formally recognise:

- **Psychosocial safety**
- **Consent-based and high-risk practice governance (including intimacy work)**
- **Disability access and inclusive participation**
- **Income stability for professional artists**

as **core cultural infrastructure requirements**.

Australia's creative industries are internationally recognised yet structurally under-supported. Without systemic reform, the sector will continue to experience:

- Workforce attrition
- High rates of psychological distress
- Entrenched inequity in participation and pay

This submission outlines a **national, scalable model grounded in sector expertise** to deliver safer, more sustainable and globally competitive creative industries.

2. Problem Definition

2.1 Psychosocial Risk as a Core Industry Condition

Creative industries operate under conditions that inherently elevate psychosocial risk, including:

- Insecure, project-based employment
- Irregular and extended working hours
- Exposure to emotionally demanding and intimate material
- Touring and isolated work environments
- Power imbalances within production hierarchies

These conditions align directly with recognised psychosocial hazards under Australian WHS frameworks, requiring structured prevention and management approaches.

[\[safework.nsw.gov.au\]](https://safework.nsw.gov.au)

Research indicates that creative workers experience **significantly elevated psychological distress compared to the general population**, reinforcing the need for sector-specific responses.

2.2 Structural Poverty and Underpayment

A critical systemic gap within the sector is **embedded economic precarity**, characterised by:

- Pay structures that are **not commensurate with the intellectual, emotional, and physical labour required**
- Extensive **unpaid or underpaid preparation work**, including rehearsal, research, and risk planning
- Ongoing expectations that practitioners **self-fund professional development**, including:
 - Training and certification
 - Mental health and trauma-informed practice
 - Cultural competency and accessibility training

Survey data indicates:

- Approximately **19.6% of creative workers earn below the poverty line**
 - A majority report **low income, high cost of living, burnout, and fatigue**
- [\[citizensin...rmation.ie\]](https://citizensinformation.ie)

This constitutes a structural flaw in sector design, where highly skilled practitioners effectively **subsidise the industry through unpaid labour and personal financial risk**.

2.3 Inconsistent Access and Inclusion

Barriers to participation for people with disability remain widespread due to:

- Lack of consistent funding for services such as:
 - Audio description
 - Captioning and Auslan
- Limited workforce development for access practitioners
- Disproportionate exclusion in regional and small-scale productions

Evidence indicates tens of thousands of Australians experience vision impairment alone, underscoring unmet demand for accessible arts participation.

[\[supportact.org.au\]](https://supportact.org.au)

3. Policy Proposal

This submission recommends a **four-part national reform package**.

3.1 National Creative Industries Psychosocial Safety Standard

Establish a nationally aligned framework that:

- Translates WHS obligations into **creative-sector-specific protocols**
- Applies across:
 - Stage and screen production
 - Rehearsal and training environments
 - Freelance and educational contexts

Key requirements:

- Mandatory identification of a **qualified safety officer** (with contact details) prior to release of public funding
 - Required engagement of **qualified Intimacy Directors/Coordinators** where productions involve intimacy or exposure work
 - Standardised reporting and compliance mechanisms
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3.2 Embedded Workforce Support Systems

Shift from training-only approaches to **embedded safety infrastructure**, including:

- **Wellbeing Rovers:** mobile psychosocial safety practitioners
- **On-site mentorship programs** integrated into production and education environments

Evidence confirms that **prevention-focused and embedded models are more effective than standalone interventions**. [csi.edu.au]

3.3 National Access and Inclusion Fund

Establish a national co-investment fund to:

- Subsidise delivery of:
 - Audio description
 - Captioning and Auslan
- Support access workforce development
- Ensure regional equity

This aligns with existing policy frameworks focused on participation, wellbeing, and inclusion. [supportact.org.au]

3.4 Targeted Basic Income Pilot for Professional Artists

Introduce a **UBI-style pilot** for artists who demonstrate:

- Minimum **5 years of sustained professional practice**
- Evidence of income instability

International precedent (Ireland):

- Weekly payment of **€325 to approximately 2,000 artists** [theguardian.com]
- Outcomes include:
 - Improved wellbeing
 - Increased time spent on creative work
 - Greater sector retention [eiai.ie]
- Demonstrated **positive societal return on investment** [[Briefing P..y.PDF.docx | PDF](#)]

This model directly addresses structural poverty and enhances workforce retention and productivity.

4. Implementation Approach

A staged national implementation model is recommended:

Phase 1 (Year 1)

- National consultation and framework development
- Pilot program design (psychosocial safety + UBI + access)

Phase 2 (Year 2–3)

- Pilot delivery across metropolitan and regional settings
- Integration with training institutions and industry bodies
- Monitoring and evaluation

Phase 3 (Year 4+)

- National rollout and policy integration
- Ongoing funding and regulatory alignment

Governance should be delivered through a **national consortium model** including:

- Creative Australia
 - State arts bodies
 - MEAA / unions
 - Wellbeing organisations (e.g. Support Act, Crew Care)
 - Training institutions
 - Specialist practitioners
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5. Indicative Budget (National Pilot Model)

| Initiative | Annual Investment (AUD) |
|---|-------------------------|
| Psychosocial Safety Framework & rollout | \$6–10M |
| Wellbeing Rovers | \$8–18M |

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Mentorship Programs | \$6–12M |
| National Access Fund | \$25–45M |
| UBI Pilot (5,000 artists @ \$20K) | \$100M |
| Total Estimated Investment | \$145–185M annually |

6. Funding Strategy

A blended funding approach is recommended:

- **Federal–State co-investment**
- Integration into existing **arts, health, and workplace safety portfolios**
- Embedding compliance costs into **grant funding structures**
- **Lottery and philanthropic partnerships** for access initiatives
[\[supportact.org.au\]](https://supportact.org.au)
- Evaluation-aligned investment models (as demonstrated in international UBI pilots) [\[eiai.ie\]](https://eiai.ie)