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I am a student currently studying a games degree at Swinburne University of Technology. I will graduate from my degree in 2028. After this, I'd like to become an independent in the games industry as a writer and designer. This would allow me to contribute my unique perspective as a queer, transgender woman to games by creating and sharing narratives with an Australian voice. Unfortunately, my future in the industry looks uncertain with the current state of arts funding.

Games as a medium have grown significantly in the past twenty years. With the rising ease of access to independent gamemaking tools and software in this time, independent games voices have developed a strong culture of games telling unique, personal, and affecting stories. Games as a medium are no longer bereft of narrative, or cordoned into violence. The upcoming game Dawn Chorus, made possible by VicScreen funding, works within a rich culture and legacy of 'interactive fiction', a videogame genre that has been pushing the boundaries of games-as-art since the 70s. Uniquely Australian voices and stories are constantly coming from games, and they do not look like large, commercial, artless entertainment projects. They are art, engaging with the ecosystem and legacy of mediums and genres that humans have been using since before recorded history.

Despite my medium, games, generating \$600 million in domestic sales last year (an incredible 65% of the gargantuan film and television industry) it only receives 3% of the funding that those screen mediums do. Even with this restriction, small and independent studios like Team Cherry and House House have created worldwide hit games like Hollow Knight and Untitled Goose Game. In the current funding ecosystem, the overwhelming majority of independent developers that I know, aspiring to or practising within the industry, feel unable to take on projects of this scale without receiving financial support. With an increase to funding, especially in this independent space, the amount of games Australia produces could increase drastically, and hits like Hollow Knight could come significantly more frequently out of Australia.

What funding that is available in games is almost exclusively pushed out to state governments. Because of this, it is an expectation in our industry that one should apply for funding across the country and be willing to move to receive out-of-state funding they are approved for. This contributes strongly to my fear of

entering the industry. My long-term partner has an established life in Victoria, and would lose their job if we had to move for me to receive funding. This is an unacceptable risk for us, especially given how difficult it is to receive funding in perpetuity. If funding were handled by the federal government, I would be able to confidently enter the games industry and create larger works that would entirely unrealistic without funding.

I am urging the government to recognise games as the incredibly rich and economically significant art form that they are. By funding games, especially in independent sectors, the government will be able to massively bolster an industry that could outpace the positive economic impact of film and television. In doing this, they would also amplify Australian voices and stories in a medium engaged with by four fifths of our population. Doing so federally, instead of delegating to state governments, would embolden more game developers to enter the industry without the often impassible barrier of relocation.