

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) needs to be recognised as an important part of Australia's new National Arts Policy because it puts creativity directly into communities and gives people the chance to participate, not just observe.

For many people, community arts are their first real experience of the arts. It happens in prisons, schools, neighbourhood centres, festivals, public spaces and regional towns — not only in major theatres and galleries. It creates opportunities for people to tell their stories, build confidence, connect with others and feel seen.

I've worked in this space for more than 30 years, including 15 years in prison programs with Somebody's Daughter Theatre. I have also worked on community arts projects with Polyglot Theatre, Snuff Puppets and Torch. All of this work has focused on community arts projects that give voice to people who are often left behind or excluded from mainstream cultural spaces.

What I've seen over the years is that this work matters deeply. People who are rarely listened to are given the chance to speak, create and contribute. Communities that are often defined by disadvantage are able to show strength, imagination and creativity instead. The impact of that can't always be measured in numbers or reports, but you can see it in the work itself and in the people involved.

The quality of community arts work speaks for itself. Too often CACD is treated as separate from "serious" art, when in reality it produces some of the most honest, challenging and powerful work being made. It asks artists to work collaboratively, to listen, and to create work that is grounded in lived experience. That takes skill, care and long-term commitment.

A new National Arts Policy should properly support this sector with long-term funding and recognition. Community arts organisations and artists are constantly doing important cultural and social work with limited resources and short-term funding. Despite this, they continue to create meaningful projects that strengthen communities and expand access to the arts.

The arts should belong to everyone, not just those who can afford tickets or live near major cultural institutions. CACD helps make that possible. It builds connection, inclusion and participation, while creating work that is artistically strong and socially important.

If Australia wants a cultural policy that reflects the full diversity of the country, then Community Arts and Cultural Development needs to be at the centre of it.