

# SUBMISSION FOR A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

On behalf of Murray PHN, we put forward the following submission toward the development of a new National Cultural Policy. We are pleased to see that the current policy includes the role of local and place-based arts practices in contributing to health and wellbeing for all Australians represented in Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story.

Murray PHN is one of three PHNs nationally that have been commissioned by the Commonwealth Government to provide creative therapies for people living with mental health conditions. This impactful work has been enabled through the action in the Revive Policy 2023-27 under Pillar 2 to

*Provide pilot funding to support access to art and music therapy programs, and generate valuable data on the broader community impacts of, and demand for those services*

This policy recommendation enabled an investment of \$3 million nationally, resulting in new creative therapy services in urban, regional, rural and remote communities, employing creative therapists and bringing publicly funded creative therapy to primary mental health services where previously there was none.

At Murray PHN this policy direction and funding has been invested in three place-based programs that were designed in consultation with community stakeholders, including people with lived experience of mental health conditions.

- Gateway Health in Albury-Wodonga has new individual and group art and music therapy services for children up to 17 years who have moderate to severe mental health conditions, including intensive family work, and work in schools

- Dhelkaya Health in Castlemaine has a new art therapy service, including a drop in art therapy group in the community, and groups for children living with mental health challenges following the Harcourt bushfires in 2026
- Mallee Family Care has a much-needed Creative Therapy service in the isolated rural town of Robinvale. This is an area of previous market failure for publicly funded mental health services.

These new programs are contributing to health equity in rural Australia, enabling positive mental health outcomes for people who have previously been unable to access creative therapies. Participants are connecting back to other creative arts activities in their communities, enabling social connection for people at risk of isolation. Creative therapists in rural areas have gained employment, and contributed to the local health workforce.

It is vital that the next Cultural Policy has a continued emphasis and recommendations for further investment in the creative therapies in more Australian communities.

Community awareness and need for the creative arts for wellbeing and health is greater than ever. Nationally there is a highly motivated creative therapy workforce who have potential to contribute to health, wellbeing and connectedness for people from all backgrounds.

Health and community services providers are poised to add creative therapists to their workforce, as demonstrated in the Creative Therapies pilot in the Murray PHN catchment. These new services have been established quickly, with strong interest and engagement from the cultural workforce and community members alike. Participants are also connecting with other cultural activities in their communities, contributing to the growth of the cultural sector overall.

There is a huge need for sustainable investment in the creative therapies sector. Many years of short term projects, pilots and grants need to be translated into ongoing publicly available creative therapy services in every Australian community.

### Contact details

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