



# Australia's National Cultural Policy: Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) submission

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**Australian Music Therapy Association** submission to

## **Australia's National Cultural Policy**

via web submission

19 May 2026

### **A new National Cultural Policy: Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) Submission**

The Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the next National Cultural Policy. As the peak body for music therapy in Australia, AMTA supports Registered Music Therapists (RMTs) and advocates for access to safe, evidence-based music therapy across the community.

This submission highlights the importance of music therapy within the National Cultural policy and responds to the consultation's three key focus areas: why the five pillars matter to music therapy practice, the challenges and opportunities in the most relevant pillars and what should be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy.

#### **About AMTA**

AMTA is Australia's peak body for music therapy. AMTA represents RMTs, music therapy students and advocates for access to music therapy on behalf of the community. Our mission is to enable, advance, and advocate for excellence in music therapy.

AMTA is the regulating body responsible for registering music therapists, accrediting music therapy courses, and maintaining professional standards and ethics. A member organisation of Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and National Alliance for Self-Regulating Professions (NASRHP), AMTA supports RMTs to use evidenced-based practices that actively promote the health, wellbeing and functioning of Australians.

#### **Music therapy in Australia**

Music therapy is an evidence-based practice and allied health profession, and in Australia is delivered by registered music therapists (RMTs). Allied health professions all require a minimum AQF7 university-level education. Current RMT graduates have achieved a AQF9 level qualification and are accredited nationally by the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA). There are currently approximately 800 music therapists registered with the AMTA.

In Australia, RMTs:

- deliver clinical and evidenced-based music therapy interventions to promote, treat, and prevent decline in individuals' physical, psychological, cognitive, or behavioural skills and function.

- work with individuals across the lifespan, their carers, families and support people, groups, organisations and communities.
- work across a range of settings, including health, aged care, community development, mental health, disability, education, community and population health, rehabilitation, private practice, community development, youth services and justice health.
- have unique knowledge, understanding and skills in how music impacts complex neurological structures and behaviours and the therapeutic use of music.

Music therapy is increasingly included as a unique and specialist allied health profession in a range of public, government-funded programs, including:

- [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#)
- [Commonwealth Home Support Program](#)
- [Victorian Mental Health in Schools programs](#)
- [Allied Health in Mental Health Graduate Program \(VIC\)](#)
- in-development Support at Home Program.

RMTs work in many state-based health organisations and networks and are included in all state health professional awards.

RMTs provide services individually, in groups, face-to-face and via telehealth, in aged care, clinics, hospitals, disability services, community organisations and educational facilities. Many RMTs work in the community development space and could be a positive inclusion in the social prescribing space with Primary Health Networks (PHNs).

### **Why the five pillars matter to AMTA and music therapy practice**

AMTA considers the five pillars to be relevant to music therapy because they provide a practical framework for understanding culture as something all Australians should be able to access, contribute to and benefit from. Of the five pillars, three closely align with music therapy practice: *A Place for Every Story*, *Centrality of the Artist* and *Strong Cultural Infrastructure*. These pillars recognise the importance of supporting people to actively participate in culture, the value of a skilled creative therapist (including music therapy) and the need for better funding and service systems to ensure that creative therapies are accessible and available to all Australians.

*A Place for Every Story* is particularly relevant to music therapy because music therapists support people who may have experienced barriers to participating in cultural activities. These include people with a disability, people with dementia, neurodivergent people, and people living with mental ill-health. Through music therapy, people are supported to participate in culture through active music-making, self-expression, communication, and social connection. This provides individuals with an opportunity to express themselves in ways that do not rely on

words and can help individuals explore emotions, improve communication, reduce anxiety, and strengthen overall wellbeing.

RMTs work with individuals to build capacity and also across clinical, community and community arts contexts to design and facilitate accessible and inclusive music programs. They draw on their knowledge of how music operates at neurological, social, and emotional levels to create environments where participants can connect, engage, and participate regardless of ability.

In the current *Revive*, the Australian Government has already recognised the value of creative therapies, including music therapy, by funding the Creative Therapies Pilot across three PHNs that aim to support mental health and wellbeing. This policy recognition has supported creative therapists to improve access to music therapy programs and to generate valuable evidence regarding community need, service demand and broader social impacts. In practice, this has enabled the establishment of new creative therapy services across urban, regional, rural and remote communities, including in locations where there has previously been limited or no publicly funded access to creative therapy within primary mental health care. These services are contributing to improved health equity, particularly in rural Australia, by supporting positive mental health outcomes, strengthening social connection for people at risk of isolation, creating employment opportunities for creative therapists, and increasing community participation in other cultural activities.

The next National Cultural Policy should maintain a strong emphasis on creative therapies and include recommendations for further investment to expand access in more Australian communities. It should also continue to recognise music therapy not only for its health and wellbeing benefits but for its important role in promoting cultural participation, inclusion, and community connection through the arts.

## **Challenges and opportunities in the pillars most relevant to music therapy**

### Access to music therapy and community-based creative supports (Pillars 2 & 4)

Funding for music therapy is available in certain contexts, (such as NDIS, My Aged Care, and the Creative Therapies Pilot), where there are clients with chronic and complex needs. However, this funding is often limited, and the focus is typically on narrow clinical/functional outcomes.

In the independent review into Art and Music Therapy<sup>1</sup> conducted by Dr Stephen Duckett, it was recommended that non-clinical music and art for health should be accessible for NDIS participants, however, there remains a lack of infrastructure supporting access to community-based arts and music programs for people whose access needs are not met by mainstream community programs.

Registered music therapists often hold dual roles in clinical and community contexts and frequently work in community arts spaces to build accessible and inclusive community music group programs and events. Registered music therapists are therefore well placed to support Pillars 2 (A Place for Every Story) and 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure), through drawing on our extensive understanding of music for health and community building, clinical understanding of disability and access needs, and practice of making music participation accessible and inclusive. These pillars present an opportunity to develop clear guidelines and supports to increase access and participation for populations who are often unable to engage in community participation due to lack of accessible options.

[Increasing public understanding of the importance of arts and music engagement for health and wellbeing](#)

Music therapy exists on a spectrum of music and arts for health and wellbeing (see figure 1), and as described above, RMTs often bridge the gap between community and clinical uses of music for wellbeing. Recent arts and health initiatives have highlighted how public perception about the value of the arts and music can impact how people not only engage in creative practices for their own wellbeing, but how they value and engage in public creative culture<sup>2</sup>.

Registered music therapists are well placed to demonstrate and communicate the benefits of music engagement through an individual and group capacity lens.



**Figure 1:** Using music for health and therapy: A continuum<sup>3</sup>

**What should be reflected in the next National Cultural Policy**

Community awareness of the value of the creative arts for health and wellbeing continues to grow, and there is a capable and motivated creative therapy workforce ready to contribute to improved health, wellbeing and connectedness for people from diverse backgrounds. Health and community service providers are poised to incorporate creative therapists into their workforce, as demonstrated through the Creative Therapies Pilot in the Murray PHN, Healthy North Coast and Brisbane South PHN catchments. These services have been established quickly and have attracted strong engagement from both the cultural workforce and community members. However, there remains a substantial need for sustainable investment in the creative therapies sector. The longstanding reliance on short-term pilots, grants and project-based funding should now be translated into ongoing, publicly available creative therapy services in communities across Australia.

Therefore, AMTA recommends that the next National Cultural Policy include the following:

- explicitly recognise therapeutic arts practice, specifically music therapy, as part of Australia's cultural and creative workforce
- support sustainable funding pathways for community-based, inclusive and therapeutic arts programs
- improve equitable access to therapeutic arts programs, specifically music therapy, across metropolitan, regional and remote communities
- involve RMTs in future policy development, implementation and any expansion of the Creative Therapies Pilot program
- support research translation, national outcome measurement frameworks and evaluation of arts-based policy outcomes

## References

1. Duckett S. Independent review of the place of art and music therapy within Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Policy Online; 2025 [cited 2026 May 18]. Available from: <https://apo.org.au/node/332448>
2. Creative Australia. Creating wellbeing: Attitudes and engagement with arts, culture and health. Creative Australia; 2023 [cited 2026 May 18]. Available from: <https://creative.gov.au/research/creating-wellbeing-attitudes-and-engagement-arts-culture-and-health>
3. Short A, MacRitchie J. Sounding out: Music for health and wellbeing [White paper]. Western Sydney University; 2019

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