

# Youth Cultural Pass Proposal

Centre for Stories

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# Executive Summary

The Youth Cultural Pass proposes to allocate \$100 AUD annually to every young person turning 18 in that calendar year. Young people would need to apply for the voucher, and then once approved be reimbursed for the costs of cultural participation for providers who would apply to be considered. The cost of the program would depend on whether the Cultural Pass is targeted at underrepresented groups in the arts or not. There are around 300,000 18 year olds in Australia each year, with 15% of those living in low-income households. If the Cultural Pass was only available to low-income households, the cost of the pass would be around \$3.6 million, which estimates a generous redemption rate of 80%.

The arts sector faces various monetary issues from various stakeholders.

The Public	Arts Organisations	Governments
<p>Wants to enjoy quality creative and cultural experiences at a low cost.</p> <p>Young people especially are affected due to their low buying power and high demand for the arts.</p>	<p>Arts organizations require sustainable funding to deliver projects, struggling with uncertain project-based grants. Philanthropy is crucial but can allow donors to influence operations due to their financial power.</p>	<p>Government budgets are under pressure with a high cost of living and international uncertainties, yet Australia's government investment in "recreation, culture, and religion" is significantly behind other OECD nations.</p>

There is not a single solution that satisfies everyone here – the solution is a compilation of low-cost actions that builds on what governments currently invest into the arts. A Youth Cultural Pass is one of those low-cost actions.

## Opportunities

Vouchers are capable of offering a consumer-centric approach that can potentially address several key challenges simultaneously:

- 1. Enhanced Engagement and Cultural Citizenship:** By directly lowering the cost of entry, vouchers can significantly change consumer behaviour, encouraging greater and more diverse engagement with the arts and fostering a sense of cultural ownership among young people. There is already a demand for young people to attend more arts events – 48% of young people would like to attend more arts events, but 56% of young people cite costs of tickets or entry as a barrier to arts access (Creative Australia, 2025).

2. **Consumer Empowerment and Market Dynamics:** Vouchers empower consumers by transferring purchasing power and providing them with a choice of providers.
3. **Reducing Financial Barriers and Promoting Equity:** This strategy is particularly effective in reducing financial barriers for individuals from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, ensuring that cultural participation is not exclusive to those with greater disposable income (Baldin et al., 2025).
4. **Fostering New Audiences:** By introducing young people to the arts at an early stage, demand-side financing can cultivate a new generation of regular arts patrons, securing the sector's long-term audience base. Since the voucher would only be spent on approved providers, the Youth Culture Pass would provide quality cultural and creative organisations with a channel to advertise their cultural programs and goods. Evidence for this effect has been observed in Italy (Baldin et al., 2025). Young people are also identified as an investment group in the Albanese government's National Cultural Policy, *Revive* (Australian Government, 2023b).
5. **Transparency:** The process of money allocation is clear and transparent to all participants in the system. Currently, the arts sector views the grant process as unclear (ArtsPay, 2024).

## Benefits

Even though research into cultural participation and attendance's benefits are still being explored, there are several evidence-based benefits to implementing a youth cultural pass:

Area of Benefit	Context and challenges for young people	Relevant impact of a Youth Cultural Pass
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow productivity growth may reduce future quality of life and wages (Australian Government, 2023a). The future workforce needs adaptable skills to adjust to new processes, products, and economic shifts.</li> <li>• A decline in educational aspirations among disadvantaged students poses risks to future equity, workforce participation, and success (Productivity Commission, 2023)</li> </ul>	Cultural participation links to increased intent for further education (Fujiwara et al., 2014) and improved educational attainment, cognitive abilities, and literacy skills (Tripney et al., 2010).
Social Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36% of Australians felt like a stranger in their own country in 2017 (O'donnell et al., 2024).</li> </ul>	Shared participation in cultural experiences foster social capital by connecting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social cohesion and sense of belonging has been on the decline in Australia since 2018.</li> <li>• Students' sense of belonging has not changed in a meaningful way since 2018 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023).</li> </ul>	<p>people of diverse ages and backgrounds (Hammonds, 2023).</p> <p>Social capital is essential for achieving trust, tolerance, and empathy in society.</p>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian youth have the highest prevalence of mental illness (38.8% of people aged 16–24) than any other age group. (ABS, 2023)</li> <li>• In the future, more Australians will have chronic health conditions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).</li> <li>• Government expenditure on healthcare is predicted to grow (Australian Government, 2023).</li> </ul>	<p>For children and young people, engaging in the arts positively influences self-confidence, self-esteem, relationship building, and a sense of belonging – all factors contributing to resilience and overall mental wellbeing (Zarobe &amp; Bungay, 2017).</p>
First Nations Community Building and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian First Nations communities and individuals' wellbeing have been significantly affected by colonisation.</li> <li>• Healing from the ongoing impacts of colonisation is a holistic process and includes the vital role of cultural practises.</li> <li>• Disruptions to family and kinship connections, including inter-generational trauma, have been linked to increased suicide and suicidal behaviour in First Nations communities (Dudgeon et al. 2021).</li> </ul>	<p>There is evidence that engagement in arts and cultural practices play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of Australian First Nations people and addressing the social determinants of health (Bourke et al., 2022; Salmon et al., 2019).</p> <p>Participation in culturally relevant arts programs can also foster feelings of belonging, hope, and purpose within communities (Cooper et al. 2012).</p>

## Case Study Findings

This concept is not unprecedented. The sporting sector provides a successful precedent, having effectively introduced demand-side financing through various voucher and rebate schemes. The rollout and effect of vouchers for creative and cultural access in Italy, Spain, and Singapore have also been explored in this report.

1. Not everyone will redeem the voucher. Expect only 55–70% of available vouchers to be redeemed.
2. Local institutions have seen their ticket sales increase since the introduction of vouchers.

3. Small cultural and creative organisations establish trust and credibility by being approved voucher vendors.
4. An increase in participation and benefits is associated with lower SES individuals. (Baldin et al., 2025; Reece et al., 2020)
5. Vouchers can result in sustained higher consumption even after the voucher is unavailable (Baldin et al., 2025)

## What would be required to implement it

Implementing a Youth Cultural Pass would require governments to establish a clear policy and administrative framework that defines eligibility, voucher value, and the types of cultural activities that can be purchased with the pass. A digital system would need to be developed to allow young people to apply for and redeem vouchers, while cultural organisations would apply to become approved providers able to accept them. This platform would manage identity verification, voucher activation, redemption, and reimbursement to providers. Administrative oversight would also be required to monitor fraud, manage provider approvals, and collect participation data for evaluation.

Successful implementation would also depend on cooperation between federal, state, and local governments, alongside participation from cultural organisations across the sector. Initial investment would be needed to build the digital infrastructure, hire staff to administer the program, and conduct outreach to both young people and providers. A pilot program could be used first to test design settings, assess uptake, and refine eligibility rules before expanding the pass nationally.

## Possible challenges and how to manage them

Large public participation programs often prompt questions about cost, implementation, and potential impacts on existing systems. Several key concerns are commonly raised in relation to cultural voucher schemes, including the impact of ticketing levies, the risk that vouchers could replace existing arts funding, treasury preferences against hypothecated funding, and questions about fairness or public cost.

These concerns are manageable through careful program design. A small ticketing levy would have minimal price impact and could be integrated into existing ticketing systems, while increased attendance stimulated by the voucher may offset any marginal costs. The Youth Cultural Pass is intended to complement rather than replace existing arts funding, addressing the demand side of cultural participation while grants continue to support production and organisational sustainability. The Pass can be funded through contributions from governments, philanthropy, and modest sector levies, reducing reliance on any single funding source while maintaining fiscal flexibility.

# Introduction

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The arts sector faces various monetary issues from various stakeholders. The public wants to enjoy creative and cultural experiences at a low cost, arts organisations need funding to deliver projects, and government budgets are under pressure with a high cost of living and international uncertainties.

There is not a single solution that satisfies everyone here—the solution is a compilation of low-cost actions that builds on what governments currently invest into the arts. A Youth Cultural Pass is one of those low-cost actions.

In a cost of living crisis, people are cutting back on their spending, and one of the things that goes is the arts. The arts industry—especially live music, is still recovering from COVID-19. Whilst targeted COVID-19 initiatives like the Arts Sustainability Fund have helped the recovery of the arts to a pre-COVID state, 5 years later these funds are closed, but the creative and cultural industry has not fully recovered.

These funds are also targeted at arts organisations and artists, rather than the consumers themselves. Even though young people have an interest in attending more art events, cost remains a barrier to young people accessing the arts. This is especially true given that young people are disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis due to earning some of the lowest wages.

Introducing a Youth Cultural Pass provides a low-cost way for young people to access art without their financial situation being a barrier in the short term. In the long term, a Youth Cultural Pass engages young people in the arts, and benefits more than just the art sector.

A successful and thriving cultural and creative sector benefits individuals who engage in it and wider society. There are health, economic, and social cohesion benefits too.

## \* The Vision

The Youth Cultural Pass is one of many low-cost ways that all levels of government can collaborate to stimulate the creative and cultural sector whilst enabling the public to engage in the sector without financial barriers.

# Section 1: The Challenge

In a cost of living crisis, sales and services income from the public is lower. This has led to the financial sustainability of Australia's arts and cultural sector being reliant on government funding.

While the creative and cultural sector's overall income in 2019–2020 consisted heavily on sales and services, which accounted for 87% of total income (A New Approach, 2023), this does not reflect the financial situation of all organisations. Specifically, not-for-profit organisations within the industry are far more dependent on other funding, as only 27% of their total income came from sales and services, and the profitability of these activities varies greatly among organisations.

## \* Testimonies from ArtsPay's Turning Point report

*"I don't have much interaction with philanthropists – due to class barriers – I mostly work with government funding. Feels exclusive."*

*"One off grants are good, but to make world class work, artists need sustained support."*

*"As an artist, project funding is a mess. If you keep spinning that wheel you will lose your mind."*

*"Project funding is so short term – just a year – and you spend more time administering the grant rather than doing the work."*

(Source: ArtsPay 2024)

Most arts organisations rely significantly on funding from various levels of Australian government—federal, state, and local—to ensure the financial viability of their projects and operations (Caust, 2024; Hands, 2020).

While this sustained government investment is crucial, the prevailing model of project-based funding has proven to be inherently unsustainable, particularly for smaller organisations (ArtsPay, 2024). Arts funding applications are often not successful too. Out of the 4065 applications received by the Australia Council for the Arts (now known as Creative Australia) in 2018–2019, only 14% (587) were successful (Pennington & Eltham, 2021, pg 43). Creative Australia states on their website that "Success rates are usually between 10% and 15%." (Creative Australia, 2025a). This reliance creates financial instability and limits the capacity for long-term strategic planning.

Funding for the arts is predominantly directed towards the supplier side—either to individual artists through grants or, more commonly, to arts organisations themselves. While this supply-side support is essential for creation and production, artists alongside arts and cultural organisations struggle to survive off competitive grants that run on

uncertain cycles (Flack, 2025). Arts organisations, especially smaller and emerging ones, continue to struggle with inconsistent funding streams and cash flow challenges (ArtsPay, 2024).

A critical missing link in the current funding ecosystem is a mechanism that directly stimulates and empowers arts consumption. Research detailed in Section 2 consistently indicates that Australian youth express a desire to attend arts and cultural events more frequently. However, a major and persistent barrier to young people's attendance is the cost of tickets, transport, and associated expenses.

Given the significant financial barrier faced by young potential audiences, a compelling argument emerges for pivoting towards demand-side strategies as a complementary approach to direct arts funding. While the cultural and creative sector currently receives major government support and subsidies, this input has not adequately addressed the fundamental issues of financial instability for the producers or access for the consumers.

Vouchers are a proven and effective instrument in demand-side financing (Schmidt et al., 2010). They transfer purchasing power to target groups to increase specific forms of consumption. They have been used internationally outside of the arts as a public policy tool to boost engagement in education (Schwerdt et al., 2012; Gazmuri, 2024), healthcare (Brody et al., 2013), sports (Centre for International Economics [CIE], 2022), childcare (Havnes & Mogstad, 2011), and housing (Carr & Koppa, 2020).

While donors can fund cultural organisations as an alternative to government support, philanthropy's power dynamics mean donors significantly influence operations, limiting creative autonomy (von Schnurbein et al., 2021). Some artists, particularly those from First Nations communities, feel the philanthropic sector lacks crucial cultural insight (ArtsPay, 2024). Vouchers offer a different approach by specifically targeting certain consumer groups to engage with the arts. This system benefits both consumers, who gain autonomy in their choices, and producers, who maintain the freedom to create.

**Vouchers are capable of offering a consumer-centric approach that can potentially address several key challenges simultaneously:**

- **Enhanced Engagement and Cultural Citizenship:** By directly lowering the cost of entry, vouchers can significantly change consumer behaviour, encouraging greater and more diverse engagement with the arts and fostering a sense of cultural ownership among young people.

Cultural goods are also experience goods, so their quality can only be assessed after consumption (Baldin et al., 2025). The arts is often an acquired taste and familiarity enhances appreciation and helps develop greeted demand (Li et al., 2024).

- **Consumer Empowerment and Market Dynamics:** Vouchers empower consumers by transferring purchasing power and providing them with a choice of providers. This encourages arts organisations to be more responsive to audience needs and preferences, promoting a more dynamic and competitive cultural marketplace.
- **Reducing Financial Barriers and Promoting Equity:** This strategy is particularly effective in reducing financial barriers for individuals from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, ensuring that cultural participation is not exclusive to those with greater disposable income (Baldin et al., 2025)
- **Fostering New Audiences:** By introducing young people to the arts at an early stage, demand-side financing can cultivate a new generation of regular arts patrons, securing the sector's long-term audience base.
- **Transparency:** The process of money allocation is clear and transparent to all participants in the system. Currently, the arts sector views the grant process as unclear (ArtsPay, 2024).

The proposed Youth Cultural Pass is a concrete mechanism for implementing this demand-side strategy. It would serve to transfer purchasing power directly to young people, a demographic that often lacks the disposable income necessary for frequent cultural consumption.

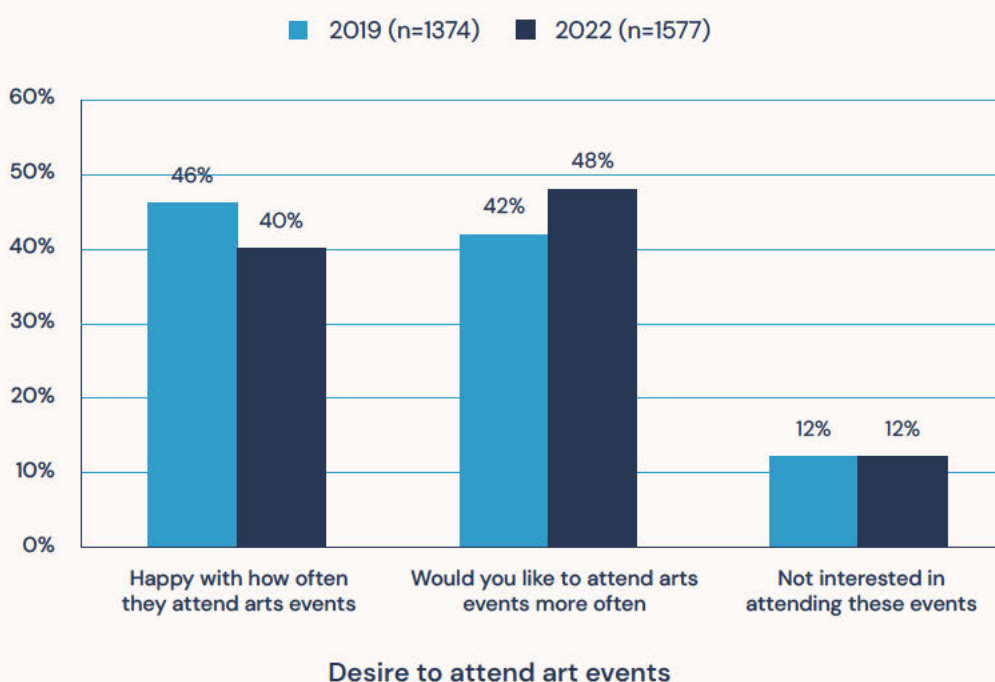
This concept is not unprecedented. The sporting sector provides a successful precedent, having effectively introduced demand-side financing through various voucher and rebate schemes. These initiatives have demonstrated that by empowering the consumer, sectors can create a healthier market, stimulate participation, and reduce the sector's overall reliance on direct government grants for day-to-day operations. A Youth Cultural Pass would aim to achieve a similar outcome, fostering a more resilient, accessible, and audience-driven arts ecosystem in Australia.

## Section 2: Why target youth?

80% of young Australians would attend more live music events if they had access to a \$200 government funded voucher (Starr, 2025). Young people express interest and demand for the arts, but there are several barriers to accessing the arts.

Young people's desire to attend arts events more often since 2019 has grown by 6% (Creative Australia, 2023). This was captured through the National Arts Participation Survey (NAPS), which surveyed young people aged 15–24. The survey also captured that in 2022 only 52% of young people agreed with the statement that "there are plenty of opportunities for me to get involved in cultural and creative experiences" (Creative Australia, 2023, pg 107).

## Desire for young people aged 15–24 to attend arts events over time



Graph 1: *Desire for young people aged 15–24 to attend arts events over time. Data taken from Creative Australia’s National Arts Participation Survey Audience and Advocacy Tools.*

Young Australians aged 12–24 have the lowest median total income in Australia (\$23,840) (ABS, 2021), often due to entry-level and junior wages. Junior employees under 16 who are *not covered by a modern award* receive only 37% of the adult pay rate (Taylor, 2020). For example, under the Fast Food Award, an under-16 part-time worker earns \$10.62/hour on weekdays, compared to \$26.55 for an adult (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2025).

Paying the average Australian live performance ticket price of \$115.12 (Live Performance Australia, 2024) requires an under-16 Fast Food Award worker to work 10 hours and 45 minutes, while an adult on the same award only needs 4 hours and 15 minutes (all rounded to the nearest 15 minutes).

Cost of tickets or entry emerged as the most cited barrier to arts access in both the 2019 and 2022 NAPS. This financial barrier became significantly more prominent in 2022, with 56% of respondents aged 15–24 identifying it as an issue (Creative Australia, 2023, pg 107), a notable increase from the 29% who reported it as a barrier in 2019 (Creative Australia, 2025c).

Despite a continuing strong demand for live music among Australians (Creative Australia, 2025c), the cost remains a significant barrier for many. A report by Tixel indicated that a majority of Australians (57%) have been forced to choose between attending live events and covering essential living expenses in the past year (Bolster, 2025, pg 8).

It is also important to note that this financial barrier is felt more profoundly by those who do not have capacity to work due to disability, caring responsibilities, and cultural responsibilities. It is important that these people who face intersectional challenges also have access to the arts, as it is often their stories who are left unheard.

Young people are also identified as an investment group in the Albanese Government’s National Cultural Policy, *Revive* (Australian Government, 2023b). The introduction of a Cultural Pass would provide a meaningful avenue for youth engagement and investment in arts.

It is important to understand the varying needs and demands of young people. 12–24 is a large age range, and a 12 year old will have different decision making processes and priorities over a 24 year old. To avoid making the scope of this project too wide, implementing something similar to Italy where everyone born in a calendar year receives the voucher that year could work. Recognizing the diverse needs and priorities across the 12–24 age range is crucial, as a 12–year–old’s decision–making differs significantly from a 24–year–old’s. To prevent the project’s scope from becoming overly broad, an approach similar to Italy’s could be adopted, where the voucher is distributed annually to everyone born within a specific calendar year.

Cohort	Typical Age	Key Characteristics	Main Barriers	What Drives Uptake
Early Adolescents	12–15	High parental influence, minimal independent income, school-mediated access	Reliance on parent approval, limited transport autonomy	Parental buy-in, school endorsement, low-friction access
Late Adolescents	16–18	Limited income, high time pressure, strong peer influence	Transport, scheduling, competing school and work demands	Peer validation, convenience, clear relevance
Emerging Adults	19–21	Transitional independence, students/apprentices/casual workers	Price sensitivity, unstable schedules, relevance filtering	Flexible delivery, perceived immediate value
Young Adults	22–24	Greater autonomy, some caring responsibilities, preference-led choices	Time scarcity, expectations around quality and fit	Alignment with personal priorities, convenience, choice

Across younger cohorts, vouchers influence household decision-making more than individual choice. As age increases, control shifts toward the individual, requiring progressively less parental or institutional mediation and more preference-driven engagement.

## Section 3: Benefits to Stakeholders

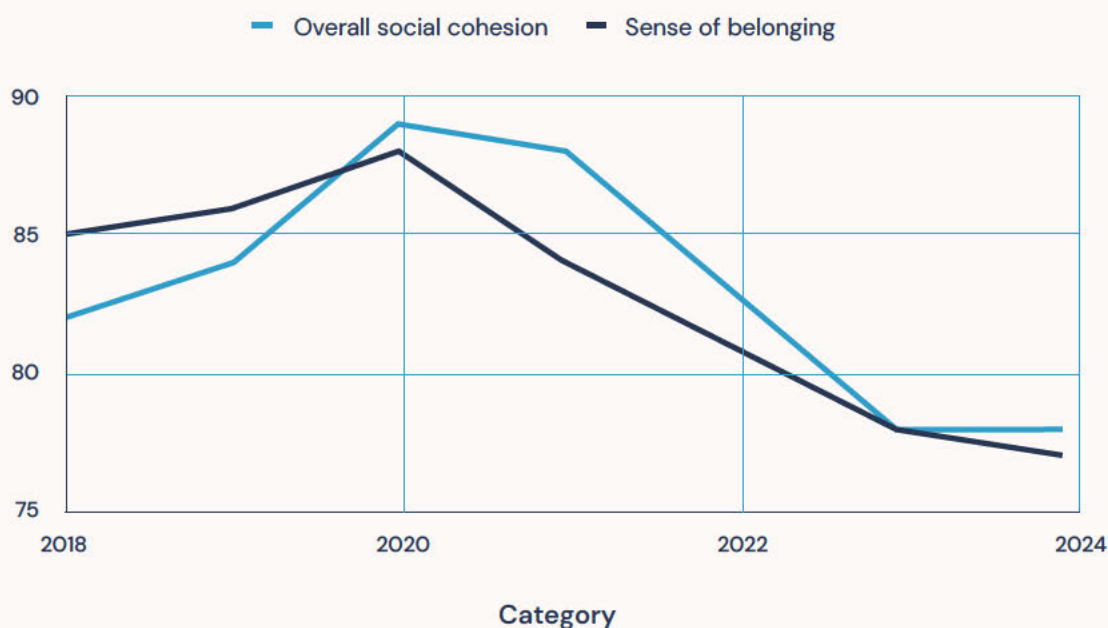
### Benefits to Society

#### Education

Whilst the benefits of active participation in arts programs have been explored (Keyes et al 2024, Oliver et al 2025), cultural engagement in more passive ways such as participation and attendance is still a growing field in research. Cultural participation and attendance has been linked to an increased likelihood of intent to undertake further education (Fujiwara et al., 2014) and improved educational attainment, cognitive abilities, transferable skills, and literacy skills (Tripney et al., 2010).

#### Social Cohesion

Overall social cohesion and sense of belonging



Graph 2: Social cohesion and sense of belonging in Australia from 2018 to 2024. Source: O'donnell et al., 2024

36% of Australians felt like a stranger in their own country in 2017, and ¼ of Australians reported frequent feelings of loneliness in 2018 (A New Approach, 2019). Australia's social cohesion and sense of belonging has been declining since 2020 (Graph 2). Cultural and creative activities hold the power to build community and a sense of belonging to places, groups, or to a cultural activity itself (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). This is due to their strong collaborative, expressive, and emotional elements.

Shared participation in cultural experiences foster social capital by connecting people of diverse ages and backgrounds (Hammonds, 2023). Social capital is essential for achieving trust, tolerance, and empathy in society. Cultural activities can also help share stories and bridge social boundaries of race/ethnicity, religion, gender, age, and nationality. Art is a universal form of communication that moves beyond language barriers. It increases the visibility of marginalized and vulnerable communities, such as First Nations, migrant, queer, and disability communities.

Studies have found that there are direct links between participating in arts and cultural activities and social capital (Daykin et al., 2020; Sonke et al., 2025). People who engage with the arts as an audience member are 6% more likely to volunteer frequently (once a fortnight or more), and have increased charitable giving. (Fujiwara et al. 2014).

It is worth noting that the WA State Government's funding to the arts and cultural organisations provides a benefit to funding ratio of approximately 5 to 1 (Department of Local Government, Sport, and Cultural Industries, 2019). In 2019, total health benefits attributable to the Western Australian Government's funding towards arts and culture equated to \$28 million. Education benefits totalled approximately \$34 million and Social Capital benefits are estimated to amount to \$5 million.

There were limitations to the estimations above though. The benefit calculations were conservative as some benefits of artistic and cultural activities could not be quantified, and opportunity costs were not considered.

## Health

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the essential contribution of cultural activities to personal wellbeing. For instance, the *Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participations Survey* found that nearly half (48%) of Australians reported that creative experiences and activities had a positive effect on their general or mental health during that time (Creative Australia 2023, pg 11). Furthermore, the 2022 NAPS indicated that 35% of young people are motivated to participate in art specifically to enhance their wellbeing.

Research indicates evidence of positive association between cultural participation and better mental health (Viola et. al, 2024; Jensen et. al, 2023), and improved overall health and wellbeing (Cuypers 2011; Farrell, 2016; Fujiwara 2014).

One in five Australians attend the arts for reasons related to health and wellbeing (Creative Australia, 2023). Enjoyment is the main reason Australians participate in the

arts, regardless of their mental health status (Creative Australia 2025c). 71% of young people in the 2022 NAPS reported entertainment and having fun as a motivation to engage in the arts.

The National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing (ABS, 2023) found that 38.8% of people aged 16–24 years had a 12-month mental disorder from 2020–2022. Australian youth have the highest prevalence of mental illness than any other age group. Almost half (45%) of Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. In 2020–2021, mental health services cost the Australian Government \$11.6 billion. Engagement in the arts and cultural activities is related to reduced depression/anxiety (Cohen et al. 2006; Cuypers 2011) and lower levels of stress (Fancourt 2016). While artistic engagement also offers benefits for seniors, this report focuses exclusively on the youth target audience for the cultural pass.

UK research found that the health and wellbeing benefits for an adult who engages with culture every few months or more are individually valued at approximately £1,000 per year. Societally, these benefits, which include increased productivity due to better health, are estimated to be worth just over £8 billion annually at a population level (Bell et al., 2024).

For children and young people, engaging in the arts positively influences self-confidence, self-esteem, relationship building, and a sense of belonging—all factors contributing to resilience and overall mental wellbeing (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). There is evidence that the arts support the development of resilience in young people (Macpherson et al., 2016) too.

## Benefits to First Nations Communities

Australian First Nations communities and individuals' wellbeing have been significantly affected by colonisation. Healing from the ongoing impacts of colonisation is a holistic process and includes the vital role of cultural practises. As a result, wellbeing strategies often incorporate cultural performances, intergenerational connection, art and performance, and language revitalisation (Salmon et al. 2019)

In postcolonial contexts where cultural continuity has been disrupted, the arts are vital for sharing and maintaining First Nations culture whilst challenging Eurocentric narratives (McKinnon, 2020). This is particularly true in remote communities, where limited infrastructure and leisure resources often lead youth toward harmful or negative activities (South Australian Commissioner for Social Inclusion 2007). Art is a powerful medium for storytelling, exploring the past, present, and future.

Research indicates that participation in culturally relevant arts programs can be highly effective, fostering feelings of belonging, hope, and purpose within these communities (Cooper et al. 2012). Furthermore, involvement in these activities acts as a protective factor, significantly reducing the risk of negative behaviours, including self-harm and substance abuse (Colquhoun & Dockery 2012).

There is growing recognition and evidence that engagement in arts and cultural practices play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of Australian First Nations people and addressing the social determinants of health (Bourke et al., 2022; Salmon et al., 2019). Ensuring First Nations people have access to cultural and creative activities is crucial for community well-being and resilience.

## Benefits to Cultural and Creative Organisations

The voucher would only be able to be spent on a list of approved providers who have signed up to participate in the voucher pass. This would mean that the Youth Culture Pass provides cultural and creative organisations with a channel to advertise their cultural programmes and goods. The Youth Cultural Pass would give cultural and creative organisations an opportunity to connect with new audiences who would not engage with them otherwise.

Some critiques of the voucher system in both the cultural sector and other sectors are doubt in turning short term subsidies into long-term interest and support for the sector. Vouchers provide a way for people who are not familiar with cultural and creative activities to engage in experiences that are meaningful and provide opportunities for familiarisation and greater demand. Italy's Culture Bonus voucher causally brought higher consumption of cinema (a relative size effect of 28% increase) even after people had aged out of eligibility criteria for the voucher (Baldin et al., 2025).

A common critique of demand-side interventions is that they provide a short-term "sugar hit" without addressing structural weaknesses within arts organisations, particularly around audience development and relevance. This critique is valid. A Youth Cultural Pass is not intended to compensate for underperforming organisations or to guarantee audiences regardless of relevance or quality.

Instead, the voucher functions as a market signal. By transferring purchasing power directly to young people, the scheme reveals what types of cultural experiences young audiences actively choose when price barriers are reduced. This information is currently missing from the sector, where programming decisions are often driven by historical precedent, internal artistic preferences, or funding criteria rather than real-time audience demand.

Organisations that already understand and engage young audiences are likely to benefit immediately. Others may experience limited uptake, highlighting the need for improved audience research, co-design, and youth engagement strategies. In this way, the voucher does not shield organisations from market realities but exposes them to them in a controlled, policy-supported environment.

## Benefits to Government

Public investment in vouchers is often assessed narrowly through a program-cost lens. This misses the broader fiscal and economic returns generated when vouchers stimulate activity that would not otherwise occur. Attendance-driven schemes create measurable flow-on benefits across tax revenue, employment stability, and local business ecosystems.

### GST Uplift

Voucher-supported spending generates taxable transactions that would not occur in the absence of the subsidy. Ticket purchases, class fees, and associated consumption convert public expenditure into immediate GST revenue, partially offsetting program costs.

### Business continuity

By lifting demand consistency, vouchers reduce business exits in cultural, recreational, and community service sectors. Preserving viable providers protects ongoing PAYG, payroll tax obligations, and downstream supplier relationships, avoiding the fiscal and economic costs associated with business churn.

### Induced spending

Attendance generates secondary expenditure beyond the subsidised activity itself. Food and beverage purchases, transport costs, and merchandise sales linked to participation create additional economic activity and tax revenue, particularly within local economies.

## Section 4: State Existing Programs

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The following programs exist at the state level to facilitate recreational, sporting, and/or cultural activity engagement for young people. While these are not examples of the Youth Cultural Pass that would be available to young adults too, they serve as an example of how voucher systems to engage with local organisations work at the state level.

### Western Australia – Kids Access All Areas Vouchers Program

The Kids Access All Areas Vouchers program is a \$3.1 million election commitment by the Cook Government, providing up to 50,000 vouchers worth \$50 to children aged five to fifteen over two years. Families can claim one \$50 voucher per child, up to a maximum of four children for \$200.

The first round of vouchers were able to be reserved from the 11th of December 2025 and were exhausted in early January 2026. The next round of vouchers is planned to open in August 2026, and each eligible child can only claim one voucher through the program. First round vouchers must be claimed by the 31st of May 2026.

Once the voucher is reserved, tickets can be bought from an approved venue or provider. The list of approved venues and providers includes state, council, and privately operated premises, including premises in regional locations. The voucher can only be spent on arts and cultural events, and cannot be spent on workshops, sporting events, or classes. Upon uploading the tax invoice or receipt to the ServiceWA app a rebate is processed. The voucher does not need to be fully used on one activity.

## New South Wales – Active and Creative Kids Voucher

First introduced in 2018, the Active and Creative kids vouchers are available to families who receive Family Tax Benefit and have a child aged 4.5 – 18. The family can apply to receive a \$50 voucher per child twice a year to use towards sport, creative, and cultural activities with a registered activity provider, with new vouchers being available in January and July of each year.

Vouchers can be redeemed through businesses scanning a unique QR code. Vouchers cannot be split between more than one provider. The cost of the program from 2018–2023, including payment of 4.4m vouchers and administration costs, was valued at \$0.57 b.

An economic evaluation of the program from 2018–2023 found that the vouchers delivered a positive return to the people of NSW, with value expected to increase over time. For the funded period, \$1.04 was returned for every dollar spent. The largest benefit was financial relief to families (CIE, 2022).

## Other State Rebates

All states not listed above, along with the Northern Territory, offer various programs, usually as vouchers or subsidies, to encourage youth participation in sport and active recreation. These financial incentives are often permitted for use towards artistic activities like music or dance lessons. Crucially, these programs are intended to facilitate *active* skill development and participation *in* the arts (creation), not merely subsidize *consumption* of the arts (e.g., performance tickets).

Both active participation/creation and passive consumption/appreciation (attending performances, visiting exhibitions) are vital and interconnected components for a sustainable arts and cultural sector. While current programs prioritize skill development, an effective long-term cultural strategy must foster both creation and appreciative consumption among young people.

# Case study: Sporting Voucher Schemes

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Whilst there is no research into a youth voucher specifically for cultural experiences, vouchers for sport provide evidence of a demand side policy that has increased participation in activities that have a financial barrier associated with them.

## Nationally

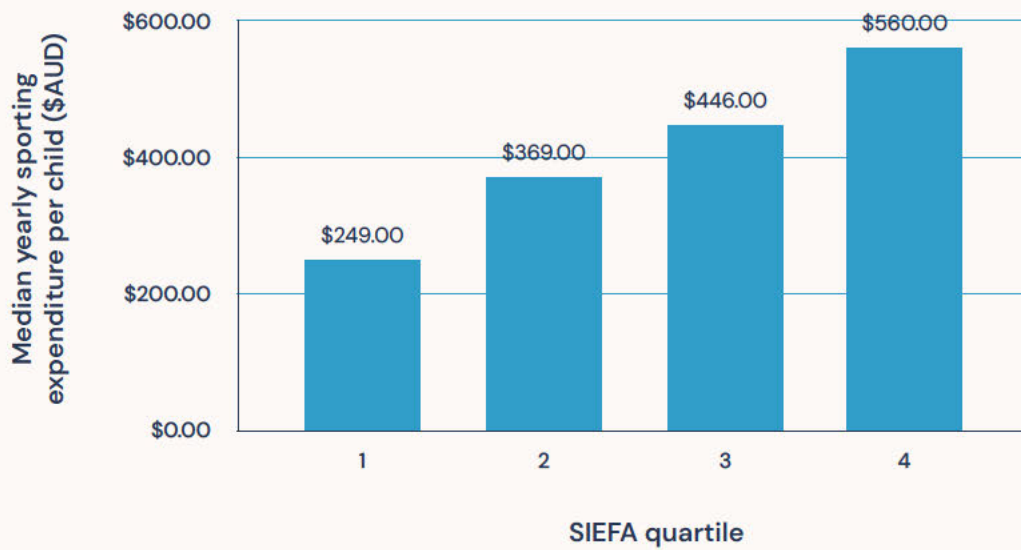
Like the arts, a common barrier to participating in sports is cost (Charlton et al., 2014). Between 2011 and 2018, five out of the eight Australian State and Territory Governments had a sports voucher scheme to children and adolescents aged between 0 and 18 years old. The median voucher value was AU\$150 p.a. (Reece et al., 2020). Overall, Reece et al (2020) found that 34% of child sport related costs were supported through the vouchers. This increased to 60% of costs supported in the lowest SEIFA quartile, compared to 27% for the highest quartile. The negative relationship between SES and expenditure supported is clear.

## New South Wales

This finding also applied at the state level when applying individual state voucher values. In New South Wales, 36% of sport related costs were supported by a \$100 voucher in the most disadvantaged areas compared to only 19% in the least disadvantaged communities (Reece et al, 2020).

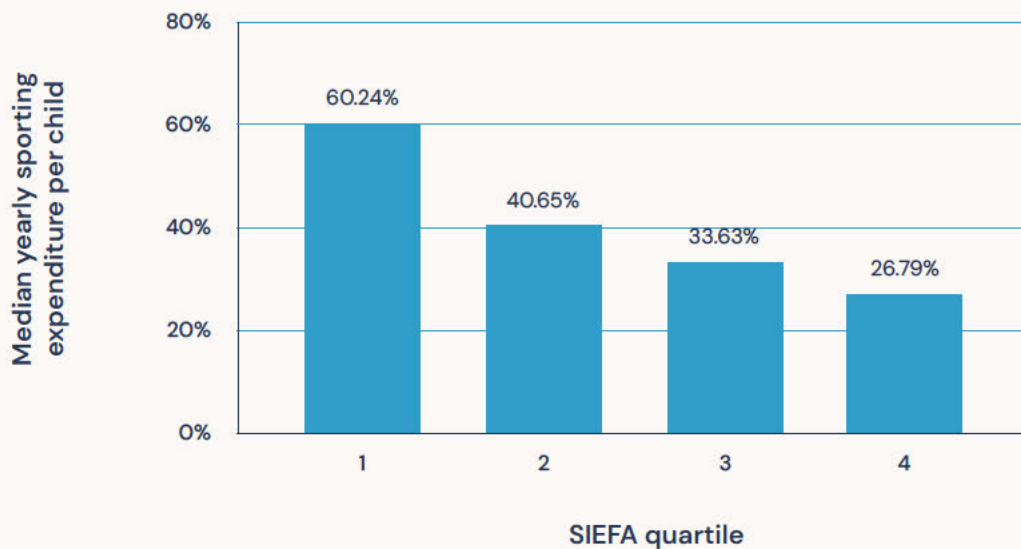
A report into the effectiveness of vouchers distributed through the Active Kids Program in New South Wales in it's first three years from 2018–2020 found the program to be a success. The program enabled 473,766 children to access activities they had not done before, and facilitated more than 200 minutes of organised sport and recreation participation per week for children who redeemed a voucher. The program overall contributed to 50% of children's overall participation in organised sport and recreation in NSW. There were also long term benefits – children maintained higher levels of activity two years later after using their first voucher (Reece, Foley, et al., 2020).

### Median yearly sporting expenditure per child for each SIEFA quartile



The relationship between SIEFA quartile and median yearly sporting expenditure per child. Graph made from data published by (Reece et al., 2020)

### % of media yearly expenditure supported by the median voucher value of \$150



The relationship between SIEFA quartile and the median yearly expenditure that was supported by the median voucher value of \$150. Data sourced from (Reece et. al, 2020)

## Section 5: International Cultural Voucher Case Studies

### Italy

The first cultural pass for youth, “Culture Bonus” or *Bonus Cultura* in Italian, was established by Italy in 2016. Young people can spend the voucher on cultural items and activities, without distinction between high and popular culture, or between online and physical stores and media. The purpose of the cultural voucher is to encourage individuals to independently explore cultural experiences that align with their personal interests. This was initially available to all residents to have €500 to redeem once they turned 18, and had to be used before the first half of the following year.

Tommaso Nannicini, Secretary to the Prime Minister at the time of the scheme’s introduction, described the motivations behind the culture bonus were to “... remind [young people] how important cultural consumption is, both for enriching yourself as a person and strengthening the fabric of ... society.” (from the books info report) A budget of €290 million was allocated to cover the 575,000 teenagers living in Italy and holding Italian or EU citizenship at the time. Later it would cover all permanent residents of Italy with a decreased budget of €230 million per year.

Edition	Year eligible citizens were born in	N. of 18 year old Italian citizens	N. of 18 year olds enrolled in the culture pass	% of eligible people enrolled	Voucher budget (million euros)	Voucher spent (million euros)
2016	1998	574,593	356,274	62%	290	162
2017	1999	578,810	416,779	72%	290	192
2018	2000	592,000	429,739	72.6%	290	199
2019	2001	586,879	389,678	66.4%	240	183
2020	2002	574,707	415,114	72.2%	220	192
2021	2003	566,163	441,845	78%	220	200

Table adapted taken from Baldin et.al 2025, who used data from the Italian Ministry of Culture

In 2024, with a new budget of €190 million a year, this was replaced with providing two vouchers that were together worth a maximum of €500 – one based on household income level, and the other based on academic achievement.

There is evidence that there was a significant impact of the cultural voucher in fostering participation with cinema, non-classic concerts, and reading books and e-books. As usual for voucher schemes, this relationship

was driven by lower SES individuals. The voucher also resulted in sustained higher consumption of the cinema even after the voucher was no longer available to that year cohort (Baldin et al., 2025).

## Spain

The Spanish Ministry for Culture launched the “Bono Cultural Joven” in 2022. This cultural voucher is a direct grant of €400 per person. Spanish citizens, residents, asylum seekers, and former wards who turn 18 that year are encouraged to apply. For example, all young adults born in 2004 who turned 18 in 2022 were eligible for the first year’s rollout and were encouraged to apply. In 2023 all adults who were born in 2005 were eligible.

**The three overarching objectives of the Bono Cultural Joven were:**

1. Provide young adults with a financial incentive to discover and enjoy culture in all its forms
2. Promote healthy consumer habits of purchasing cultural content
3. Revitalise the Spanish cultural sector post COVID-19, with an estimated investment of close to €112 million.

The Bono Cultural Joven must be requested through creating an account on the Bono Cultural Joven website. Providing identity either digitally or in-person is a part of the process. Once registration is approved the pass can be kept as a digital pass on a mobile phone or it can be collected in person from a post office.

**The Bono Cultural Joven is unique as it has different categories with predefined spending limits:**

- Up to €200 on the voucher can be spent on live arts, cultural heritage, and audiovisual arts. This includes live music, performing arts, museums, libraries, and cinemas.
- Up to €100 on the voucher for cultural products in physical format. This includes the purchase of CDs, DVDs, video games, newspapers, and books.
- Up to €100 on the voucher for digital or online consumption of cultural content. This includes the purchase of subscriptions to music streaming, reading, and audio-reading platforms, alongside the purchase of e-books and audiobooks.

By the end of the first year of the program in 2022, 99,371 transactions had taken place in 3,114 venues, organisations, and cultural businesses who participated in the program. This represented a total investment of €3.62 million. The voucher has rapidly expanded since – the voucher was used 181, 195 times in April 2023 (Honoré Hatton, 2024). The last public update on the Bono Cultural Joven in 2025 announced that in November

68.5% of the eligible population requested the Bono Cultural Joven. The Bono Cultural Joven has had more than 1.2 million beneficiaries since its 2022 launch (Ministry of Culture, Spain, 2025)

As of April 30th 2023 58.5% of expenditure through the Bono Cultural Joven was distributed to the live arts, followed behind with physical cultural goods representing 30.1% of the total (La Moncloa, 2023).

Year	Amount of people who have redeemed the voucher	% of eligible people who redeemed the voucher
2022	277,594	56.8%
2023	323,668	64.6%
2024*	334,434	63.7%
2025	366,443	68.5%

*The amount of people who redeemed the Bono Cultural Joven each year. Source: Ministry of Culture, Spain (2024, 2025a, 2025b)*

*\*indicates provisional data*

## Singapore

Singapore’s Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth introduced the SG Culture Pass in September 2025 as part of Singapore’s 60th anniversary celebrations (SG60). Singaporean Citizens aged 18 and above were granted credits worth \$100 SGD to offset ticket purchases for over 400 local arts activities, heritage activities, and programmes offered by authorised ticketing partners. The credits will be valid until the 31st of December, 2028. In the first two weeks after its launch, 320,000 Singaporeans registered and \$1.8 million SGD in credits were used.

Singaporean literature, which refers to literary books written by authors who are Singaporean Citizens or Permanent Residents, will also be able to be purchased using the credits in March 2026. The Culture Pass cannot be used to buy books online or ebooks due to its intention of encouraging Singaporeans to visit and support local bookstores.

As a new program, statistics on usage of the SG Culture Pass are unavailable currently. However, revenue for cultural institutions have increased significantly since its introduction. The National Gallery Singapore saw their ticket sales triple and local theatre shows sold out, and the Singapore Writer’s Festival 2025 saw a 30% increase in festival-goers compared to the previous year.

Founder of content platform The Urbanist Singapore Ho Yong Min said that being part of the cultural pass “signals that our tours are officially recognised as cultural offerings”, and that “For a small player without the marketing muscle of bigger institutions, that kind of validation helps build trust and credibility, which in turn leads to a more sustainable flow of participants.”

## Section 6: Addressing Concerns

Large-scale participation initiatives often raise practical concerns from key stakeholders, particularly around cost, funding structures, and implementation impacts. Anticipating these issues is important to ensure that the program is both politically and administratively viable. The following table outlines several commonly raised concerns about voucher-based cultural participation programs and explains how the design of the Youth Cultural Pass mitigates or manages these risks.

Concern	Why the concern exists	Why it is manageable or mitigated by design
Ticketing platforms concerned about levies	Platforms may worry that a levy could increase ticket prices, reduce demand, or add administrative burden.	The levy would be small and broadly applied, limiting price impacts. Participation incentives are likely to increase attendance, offsetting costs. Collection can be integrated into existing ticketing systems, and revenue is reinvested into the sector through the Cultural Pass.
Providers worried about substitution of existing funding	Arts organisations may fear that governments could reduce grants if vouchers are introduced, or that vouchers simply replace existing spending.	The pass complements supply-side funding rather than replacing it. It specifically targets affordability barriers for young audiences and is likely to generate new demand, particularly among lower-income and first-time participants.
Treasury concerns about hypothecation	Treasury may resist earmarking specific revenue streams for one program due to reduced budget flexibility.	The Cultural Pass would be funded by multiple funding sources, including government contributions, philanthropy, and a levy, maintaining flexibility while ensuring stable participation funding.
Public concerns about cost or fairness	Some may question the use of public funds or why benefits are targeted to young people	The program focuses on a life stage where financial barriers are highest and cultural habits form. Uptake rates mean total costs are lower than theoretical maximums, while benefits extend to wellbeing, social connection, and local economic activity.

## Section 7: What's next?

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### Program design

To implement a national cultural youth pass, governments at all levels should work together. A national cultural pass would bring revenue to National Cultural Institutions, state cultural institutions, and local arts centres.

Australia's government investment in "recreation, culture, and religion" lags significantly behind other OECD nations. Data from the arts and culture think tank A New Approach shows that Australia ranked 26th out of 33 OECD countries in 2021–2022 (A New Approach, 2024). During this period, Australia allocated only 0.9% of its total GDP to this sector, falling short of the OECD average of 1.2%. This trend is not new, as Australia's spending has consistently remained below the OECD average between 2017 and 2021.

Young people, aged 12–24, constitute 12% of Australia's population, with 3.2 million individuals in this demographic. If every young person was given \$200 AUD per year to spend, the money given to young people to invest in Australian arts and culture would be 60.4 million per year. To ensure that vouchers are used, like state schemes, these vouchers should require registration.

While research indicates that vouchers generate the greatest marginal impact for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, means testing introduces administrative complexity, stigma, and reduced uptake. For this reason, the Youth Cultural Pass should adopt a universal eligibility model, complemented by proportionate universalism.

Under this approach, all young people would be eligible for the base voucher, while additional supports – such as higher voucher values, targeted outreach, or extended validity periods – would be directed toward priority cohorts. This maintains universality while maximising equity and impact.

Co-design is important too. Engaging young consumers of local cultural and creative organisations and performances is key to creating a program that will engage young people authentically.

The Active Kids Vouchers evaluation report (Reece, Foley, et al., 2020) suggested that the universal eligibility criteria stay but applying proportionate universalism principles to boost inclusion and engagement of priority populations, focusing 80% of program investment on priority populations.

## Program design

A national Youth Cultural Pass should be introduced initially as a pilot program, allowing governments to test design settings, provider eligibility criteria, and behavioural impacts before full-scale rollout. A pilot approach also mitigates concerns that vouchers may have limited short-term impact on consistently sold-out major institutions.

**Rather than excluding large, high-demand organisations outright, the pilot could prioritise incremental impact by:**

- Capping voucher-redemption quotas at large institutions
- Prioritising first-time youth attendees
- Weighting promotional visibility toward small and medium organisations

This ensures that the scheme maximises additional attendance rather than subsidising demand that would have occurred regardless, while avoiding politically fraught exclusion decisions.

## Cost

In 2020, an estimated 3.2 million young people aged 15–24 lived in Australia, making up 12% of the whole population (ABS, 2020). If \$100 vouchers were offered to all 3.2 million young people, then the cost of the vouchers would be \$320 million AUD. However, not everyone eligible will redeem the voucher – Italy’s Culture Bonus had only 78% of eligible participants redeem the voucher in 2021, and only 68.5% of the estimated eligible population applied for the 2025 Spanish Youth Cultural Bonus (Ministry of Culture, Spain, 2025), and only 59% of eligible NSW children claimed and redeemed an Active Kids voucher in the first 3 years.

The Active Kids Economic Evaluation Report (CIE, 2022) found that the largest expense of the program was the vouchers themselves, making up 91% of total costs. From 2018–2023 expenses to support the program were valued at \$46 million. This includes initial IT infrastructure investment to build the platform supporting the vouchers in the first year, and an ongoing charge of \$6 from Service NSW to the Office of Sport for every voucher created. A national program would face a substantial upfront cost for developing or adapting a robust, secure, and scalable digital platform to manage the vouchers, providers, and recipients across all jurisdictions.

The Office for Sport also employed staff to manage and advise on the program. Staffing costs were approximately \$0.8 million in 2021. A national program would require a dedicated staffing component for ongoing management, oversight, and policy advice.

Potential additional costs not included in the economic evaluation included fraud due to a low prevalence, and administrative costs to providers as there was no evidence

available to assess this. The experience of the NSW Active Kids program provides key insights into potential cost implications for a national program, primarily concerning voucher expenditure, administrative fees, and staffing.

### **An alternative path to funding – Cultural Access Fund**

A Special Purpose Cultural Access Fund would provide a stable, recurring mechanism to finance access-based cultural participation. Rather than relying on episodic grants or short-term pilots, the fund would pool multiple revenue streams into a single, hypothecated structure dedicated to participation and attendance.

At its core, the fund is designed to smooth volatility, reduce administrative churn, and align incentives across government, industry, and philanthropy around access rather than production alone.

## **Measures of success**

**Measures of success for the Youth Cultural Pass could include:**

- **Increase in participation rates for youth at arts and cultural organisations:** This is a fundamental measure. Success would be indicated by a demonstrable year-over-year rise in the number of young people (within the target age range) attending or participating in events, exhibitions, performances, and workshops at registered arts and cultural venues. This could be tracked by ticket redemptions, program sign-ups, and overall attendance figures submitted by participating organisations.
- **Expansion of participation across diverse cultural sectors:** The program should aim for increased youth attendance across a variety of cultural disciplines, including museums, galleries, theatres, concert halls, historical sites, and independent art spaces, not just one or two dominant types.
- **Demographic diversity of participants:** Measures should track the engagement of youth from different backgrounds, ensuring the pass reduces existing participation barriers.
- **A target on the amount of vouchers reserved and fully used:** The program's efficiency can be gauged by tracking the issuance and redemption rates. High redemption rates (the percentage of distributed vouchers that are actually used to attend an event) and a low rate of expired/unused vouchers would signify strong appeal and ease of use. Targets should be set for both the proportion of passes activated and the average number of uses per pass-holder.
- **Cost-effectiveness per youth engagement:** Analysis should determine the program's investment return by calculating the cost of the program (including administration and subsidy) per cultural visit or engagement facilitated. A declining cost-per-visit over time would suggest increasing efficiency.

- **An increase in arts and cultural institutions relying on revenue from ticket sales rather than government grants:** A long-term goal of the pass is to help cultivate a future audience, thereby boosting earned revenue for cultural organisations. Success would be measured by a year-on-year increase in the percentage of total revenue derived from ticket sales (including pass redemptions) and a corresponding, proportional decrease in reliance on core operational government grants for baseline funding across the sector. This indicates a growing, sustainable market for arts and culture.
- **A decline in business exits in the sector:** This is an indicator of sector stability. The pass is intended to provide a predictable stream of new, young patrons, thus injecting financial stability and growth potential. A decrease in the number of arts and cultural organisations (particularly small to medium-sized enterprises) closing down or significantly downsizing their public programs would suggest the pass is contributing to the sector's economic health and resilience.
- **Growth in the average transaction size from pass holders:** Tracking whether pass holders move beyond the basic voucher value to purchase additional items (e.g., merchandise, refreshments, higher-priced tickets/upgrades) or become repeat, full-price paying customers after the pass expires, would indicate the program is successfully converting youth into long-term patrons.

# Glossary

Word	Definition
Supply side economics	Supply-side policy refers to measures that governments take to increase the availability or affordability of goods and services, along with generous tax reform.
Demand side polices	Policies designed to influence aggregate demand in an economy.
Creative and cultural sector	Areas of practice that turn original individual creativity into social and commercial outcomes.
Social cohesion	The connections and relations between societal units such as individuals, groups (and) associations' [...]; it is the 'glue' that holds communities together. Cohesiveness is created from connections based on a shared sense of belonging and attachment, similar values, trust and a sense of 'social solidarity'. (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2005)
Social capital	The value of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.
SES	Socio-Economic status. Is derived by SIEFA. Postal areas in the bottom 25% of the population aged 15–64 are classified as low SES, with the middle 50% classified as medium SES and the top 25% classified as high SES.
SIEFA	<p>Socio-Economic Index for Area (SEIFA), specifically the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), which ranks regions in Australia according to relative socioeconomic disadvantage.</p> <p>Postcode-based SEIFA percentiles were converted into quartiles, with the lowest 25% of postcodes classified as 1 (most disadvantaged area) and the top 25% of postcodes as 4 (least disadvantaged area).</p>

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