

Submission to the National Cultural Policy on behalf of the  
**Victorian Network for Creativity and Wellbeing**

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## CONTEXT

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We are writing on behalf of the **Victorian Network for Creativity and Wellbeing (VNCW)**, which was established to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange between creative health practitioners and researchers. Convened by the Creativity and Wellbeing Research Initiative (CAWRI) at the University of Melbourne, we aim to break down silos between the arts, community, health and education sectors by strengthening intersectoral alliances and advancing evidence for creative health and community wellbeing.

The World Health Organization (2026) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The VNCW adopts this definition and recognises the significant evidence base demonstrating the role of the arts, culture and creativity in promoting health, as well as preventing physical and mental ill-health, and treating health conditions.

We also acknowledge the important role of the arts for fostering social cohesion, wellbeing and resilience via community arts, socially engaged arts, and Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD). These fields of creative practice also increase access to the arts, culture and creativity, especially for diverse and/or marginalised communities and groups.

## SUBMISSION

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Our submission responds to the question: *what would you like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy?* Recommendations are structured in relation to three of the five pillars. Throughout we acknowledge overlaps and intersections with the first two pillars, and across our three selected focus areas.

### *Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist*

The current iteration of *REVIVE* recognises that cultural workers are real workers, and we commend the federal government for establishing Creative Workplaces to address sector-wide challenges with respect to financial precarity and working conditions.

However, we are concerned that the policy still largely prioritises the needs of elite/professional artists above artists working in community, education and health contexts, including within schools, hospitals, and in public/community spaces to facilitate social and cultural development.

The VNCW therefore advocates for increased recognition of the professionalism and contributions of a wider range of artists and cultural workers in the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy.

Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Trial a **Universal Basic Income for Artists (UBIA) scheme**, including regional community artists, Community Arts and Cultural Development workers, and arts health workers in the scope of creative workers eligible to participate.
- **Make creative grants non-taxable income** in recognition of the financial precarity of artists, and realities of artists reinvesting significant portions of their creative income back into their practice (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2024).

#### *Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure*

Artists and small-to-medium arts organisations working in cross-sector contexts such as creative health, arts education, and community arts and cultural development help strengthen communities and build resilience by promoting social cohesion, improving civic trust, and strengthening mental health.

By increasing access to and participation in culture both within and beyond the cultural sector, these artists and organisations contribute significantly to *Pillar 1 – First Nations First* and *Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story*.

Yet the current iteration of the National Cultural Policy offers little targeted support to creative workers engaged in cross-sector contexts. We argue that, given the significant social, health and wellbeing impacts of this work, the next iteration of the Policy should strengthen cross-portfolio and cross-sectoral infrastructure to better support this cohort of creative workers.

To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- **Establish a new dedicated national body for Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)**, similar to Music Australia or Writers Australia. This body could provide targeted support (i.e., investment, advice, and training) to community/socially engaged arts workers, while strengthening interdepartmental investment and collaboration with the Department of Health,

Disability and Aging; Department of Education; Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water; and Department of Social Services, among others.

- **Invest in a national not-for-profit arts and health organisation** that supports cross-sector collaboration across research and practice, and strengthens interstate and international networks through conferences and other targeted professional development events and activities.
- Increase the availability of **ongoing funding/multi-year investments for small-to-medium cultural organisations, as well as emerging and independent artists working in CACD**, to improve the sustainability of their work and contributions. This would reduce the administrative burden on under-resourced individuals and groups continually applying for grants.
- **Increase access to under-utilised creative spaces/physical infrastructure for community artists and groups.** Through intergovernmental collaboration, existing cultural venues and facilities such as performing arts centres, studios/galleries, and others can be made more accessible to local communities and small-to-medium cultural organisations. By expanding access to fit-for-purpose creative spaces, the practices of independent artists and smaller cultural organisations can be made more sustainable.

### *Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience*

While improved digital infrastructure can increase access to media and screen culture nation-wide, we suggest that the current iteration of *REVIVE* lacks targeted investment in audience development related to live and unmediated creative experiences across urban, regional and remote Australia.

In-person experiences strengthen local development and networks, build community resilience, and contribute to community pride. As indicated in our responses to the preceding Pillars, we believe that every Australian should have access to the arts, culture, and creative experiences where they live via local artist-led initiatives, networks and dedicated creative spaces.

We therefore recommend the following:

- Develop a **new National Arts and Culture Participation Strategy** modelled on the National Sport Strategy (A New Approach, 2025), to increase public participation in local culture, strengthen local economies, and increase public recognition of the value of the arts and culture.
- **Improve public messaging on the cultural, social and health impacts** of the arts and culture, alongside existing emphasis on economic impacts. This could align with the *Measuring What Matters* national wellbeing framework and should be reflected in communications related to the national budget.

## SUMMARY

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We commend the federal government for their progress on the actions outlined in *REVIVE*, especially with respect to *Pillar 1 – First Nations First*. The VNCW advocates for their continued efforts towards First Nations' self-determination. Within this submission, however, we have highlighted that there is limited coordination and support for artists and small-to-medium organisations working in partnership with communities and across sectors including health, education, and development.

To address these gaps, we put forward several recommendations, corresponding with the Pillar structure of the National Cultural Policy. By adopting these recommendations in the next iteration of the Policy, the government would strengthen interdepartmental and cross-sector collaboration, while also providing more targeted support for the creative workers and organisations that significantly strengthen our nation's social cohesion, wellbeing, and resilience.

## REFERENCES

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- World Health Organization. (2026). *Health and Well-Being*. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being>