



Accessible Arts

Submission to the National Cultural Policy

22 May 2026

Accessible Arts

Proudly disability-led, Accessible Arts is the peak arts & disability organisation in NSW. We advance the rights of, and opportunities for, people with disability or who are d/Deaf to develop and sustain professional careers in the arts and have equitable access to arts and culture across NSW.

In 2026, we will continue to support more than 400 artists with disability or who are d/Deaf through mentoring, employment and professional development programs including Next Level, Frame Shift, Songsmiths, Ripple Internship, Createability, Advance Your Career and Bundanon Residencies. These programs strengthen creative leadership, professional pathways and participation across the arts sector, underpinned by disability-led governance and decision-making, with 88% disability representation on our Board and more than 94% of staff identifying as d/Deaf or disabled.

We will continue to strengthen the capacity of the Australian arts, culture, screen and games sectors to meaningfully and sustainably engage with d/Deaf artists, audiences and practitioners with disability, contributing to a more vibrant, equitable and cohesive arts ecology. We will co-develop the new National Arts and Disability Code of Practice in partnership with Morwenna Collett and Inclusively Made, as part of an initiative led by Creative Australia in partnership with the Office for the Arts, Screen Australia and Creative Workplaces. As an active member of Arts and Disability Network Australia, we will contribute to national collaboration, shared advocacy and sector-wide learning.

Through our Access Ideas and Insights program, delivered online and in person, we will engage more than 2,000 participants across Australia. We will work with more than 230 organisations through our training, consulting and sector development services, including the delivery of 80 disability-led training sessions reaching over 1,800 attendees. We will also deepen our work at the intersections of disability with First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQ+ and regional communities, through partnerships and consultation with organisations representing these diverse lived experiences.

Submission Context

Alongside *Revive*, the introduction of the *Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan* is creating new opportunities for change across the arts and cultural sector by





strengthening foundations for inclusion, accessibility, and disability leadership. Key initiatives including the *Arts and Screen Employment Pathways Pilot Program*, *Revive Live* accessibility initiatives, the *National Arts and Disability Forum and Gathering*, and the development of a *National Arts and Disability Code of Practice* are beginning to support more equitable pathways for artists, audiences and practitioners with disability to participate in and shape cultural life. Collectively, these initiatives are prompting organisations to strengthen accessibility practice, build internal capability, and embed access more meaningfully across artistic, operational, and audience engagement contexts. While long-term outcomes are still emerging, the plan signals a broader shift toward a more inclusive and accessible cultural system.

Evidence from the *Towards Equity 2: Creative Australia Diversity Data Report* highlights why this shift is needed, revealing a significant gap between the 21.4%¹ of Australians who identify as people with disability or who are d/Deaf and their representation across key arts sector opportunities and participation measures. Within Creative Australia activity, representation of artists with disability or who are d/Deaf is 10% of project investment recipients, falling to 5% for international opportunity recipients and just 2% for government program recipients. These low figures across different funding streams point to persistent under-representation in nationally significant and globally oriented pathways.²

Broader participation trends show a more complex picture. The proportion of practising artists with disability or who are d/Deaf has increased from 9% to 16%, suggesting some growth in entry into, or identification within, the profession. However, engagement indicators are moving in the opposite direction, with arts attendance among people with disability or who are d/Deaf falling to 58% and creative participation dropping to 51%, reinforcing ongoing barriers to access and sustained cultural engagement despite gains in representation.³

These patterns sit alongside persistent economic and employment inequities across the sector. Artists with disability or who are d/Deaf earn on average 34% less than their non-disabled peers and face 28% higher average expenses, reflecting the additional costs of access and participation in creative practice. Employment outcomes also remain uneven, with 55% of artists with disability or who are d/Deaf experiencing unemployment compared to 46% of artists without disability. Despite 21% of Australians identifying as people with disability, only 16% of professional artists identify as disabled, underscoring enduring structural barriers across training, funding,

¹ [Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022, released 4 July 2024](#)

² [Towards Equity 2: Creative Australia Diversity Data Report \(2025\)](#)

³ [Towards Equity 2: Creative Australia Diversity Data Report \(2025\)](#)



employment pathways, and industry access that continue to constrain participation in cultural production and creative leadership.⁴

These inequities extend beyond the arts sector and reflect broader patterns of exclusion experienced by people with disability across Australian society. Disability discrimination remains among the most common complaint categories received by the Australian Human Rights Commission, particularly in relation to employment, education, and access to goods and services.⁵

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates continued entrenched barriers to economic security, equitable employment, and cultural participation for people with disability or who are d/Deaf. These outcomes are not confined to the arts but reflect wider structural inequities across Australian society. Addressing them requires more than targeted programs; it requires sustained systemic reform that embeds access, inclusion, and participation as foundational elements of cultural, economic, and civic life.

Contextual Note on Terminology

This submission uses the terms access, participation and inclusion in line with common practice across the disability and arts/disability sectors; however, their meaning and relationship are defined here for clarity.

Access refers to the foundational conditions that enable engagement in cultural life, including the removal of physical, sensory, cognitive, digital, attitudinal and systemic barriers. *Participation* describes the act of engaging in cultural activity once those conditions are in place. *Inclusion* is understood as the broader outcome in which people with disability or who are d/Deaf are meaningfully represented across the cultural ecosystem, including in creative practice, leadership, decision-making and audience experience.

Within this framing, access is positioned as the enabling infrastructure upon which participation and inclusion depend. This distinction also underpins the proposal for a Sixth Pillar focused on Access, reflecting the principle that access must be established as a core policy and systems-level foundation in order for equitable participation and genuine inclusion to be consistently achieved across the cultural sector.

⁴ [Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia by Professor Throsby and colleagues at Macquarie University, with support from Creative Australia \(2023\)](#)

⁵ [Australian Human Rights Commission \(2025\), Stats & Facts: Disability Rights, reporting 2023-24 complaint data.](#)



Accessible Arts' Recommendations

Accessible Arts strongly advocates for a cultural policy framework that embeds access and inclusion as core foundations of Australia's national cultural system, ensuring that d/Deaf artists, audiences and practitioners with disability are fully represented across all aspects of cultural life. To achieve this, we recommend three broad strategies.

1. Establishment of a Sixth Pillar: Access for All Australians

We recommend the introduction of a dedicated Sixth Pillar within Australia's National Cultural Policy focused on Access for All Australians. This would formally recognise accessibility as essential national cultural infrastructure, elevating it to the same level of strategic importance as other core policy priorities. A dedicated pillar is necessary to ensure sustained visibility, leadership, and accountability for access at the highest level of cultural decision-making, rather than allowing it to remain dispersed or treated as an adjunct consideration.

2. Embedding disability inclusion and representation as a principle across all pillars of cultural policy

We also recommend that disability inclusion and representation be embedded as a cross-cutting principle across all pillars of cultural policy. This would ensure that access and inclusion are systematically integrated into funding frameworks, program design, workforce development, and sector investment decisions. Embedding this principle across the entire policy architecture is essential to driving consistent structural change, rather than limiting responsibility to isolated programs or targeted initiatives.

3. Recognition of access as the precondition for cultural participation

Finally, we recommend explicit recognition of access as the precondition for cultural participation. Without equitable access, meaningful participation in cultural life is not possible, nor can the sector achieve a representative workforce or an accurate reflection of Australia's cultural diversity. Framing access as foundational infrastructure, rather than an optional enhancement, is critical to ensuring that cultural policy delivers genuine inclusion and full participation for all Australians.

Implementation

To implement these strategies, we recommend the series of actions and initiatives outlined in the following table.



TOWARDS AN ACCESSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY – RECOMMENDATIONS

TARGET 1. EMBED ACCESS AS NATIONAL CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH A SIXTH PILLAR

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
6	Establish a Sixth Pillar: Access for All Australians	Create a permanent sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy recognising accessibility as essential national cultural infrastructure and central to social cohesion, equity and cultural participation across Australia. This pillar provides dedicated visibility, leadership and accountability for access as a core element of cultural policy.	Sector / Artists / Audiences / Organisations
1,2,3,4,5,6	Embed disability inclusion across all pillars of cultural policy	Ensure disability inclusion is integrated as a cross-cutting principle across all pillars of the National Cultural Policy, shaping program design, funding decisions, and sector development for creatives, workers and audiences with disability or who are d/Deaf. This ensures access is embedded in all cultural activity, while the Sixth Pillar provides dedicated leadership and accountability.	Sector
3,5,6	Recognise access as the foundation of participation	Recognise that without equitable access there can be no meaningful cultural participation, representative workforce, sustainable infrastructure or true reflection of Australian cultural life.	Sector / Audiences
3,4,5,6	Position arts and disability culture as central to social cohesion through funded cultural participation and access	Recognise the role of arts and disability communities in building resilience, strengthening connection and contributing to collective wellbeing across Australia. Embed this role within cultural policy and publicly funded programs by ensuring investment actively supports disability access, inclusion and participation as core mechanisms for delivering social cohesion outcomes.	Communities / Audiences / Sector
1,2,4,5,6	Recognise Deaf and Disability cultures within cultural policy and investment settings	Recognise Deaf and Disability cultures as distinct cultural and creative systems within Australia's contemporary cultural landscape, and ensure this is reflected in cultural funding, programming and sector development that supports their visibility, leadership and sustainability.	Artists / Communities / Sector

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
3,4,5,6	Recognise arts and Disability culture as delivering public value and social outcomes	Recognise arts and disability culture as delivering significant public value through strengthening social connection, civic participation and community wellbeing, and ensure this contribution is reflected in cultural investment priorities and program design.	Communities / Audiences / Government
1,2,3,4,5,6	Support intersectional access and participation	Ensure equitable cultural participation for First Nations, regional and remote, culturally and linguistically diverse, culturally and racially marginalised, LGBTQ+ and disabled communities across all artforms and practices. Recognise that access and disability are not experienced uniformly across communities, and that cultural, geographic, linguistic and community contexts shape how accessibility is understood, delivered and experienced. In alignment with recognising d/Deaf and disabled people as cultural communities in their own right, support culturally responsive and community-led approaches to access that reflect the diversity of Australian cultural life, including sustained investment in research, consultation, and knowledge-sharing led by these communities to strengthen understanding, policy development, and future access models across the sector.	Artists / Audiences / Arts Workers / Communities
1,5,6	Acknowledge creative access as contributing to contemporary Australian artforms	Recognise creative access and disability-led practice as contributing to the development of contemporary Australian artforms, cultural expression and national cultural identity, reflecting their role in shaping new aesthetics, methods and modes of cultural production. This should be supported through sustained investment in disability-led practice, ensuring these contributions are properly resourced, developed and embedded across the cultural sector.	Sector / Artists / Communities

TARGET 2. INVEST IN ARTISTS AND ARTS WORKERS WITH DISABILITY OR WHO ARE D/DEAF, AND CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

1,3,4,6	Commit to long-term investment in arts and disability practice	Continue and expand investment beyond the current Equity plan through new and additional funding for Arts and Disability and accessible cultural participation, supported by clear national targets, accountability measures and long-term benchmarks to deliver sustained improvements in access, representation and participation across the sector.	Artists / Organisations
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Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
1,3,6	Close the access investment gap	Provide dedicated access funding in addition to standard grant caps to ensure accessibility is fully resourced and does not compete with artistic ambition or core delivery costs. This funding should cover access needs for both artists and audiences, recognising that NDIS support is not universal and cannot meet all cultural participation needs, and reinforcing the need for stable sector-based access funding to ensure equitable participation, continuity of practice, and inclusive arts and cultural experiences.	Artists / Organisations
1,4,5,6	Recognise creative access as a driver of artistic innovation	Recognise that Deaf and disability-led access practices (including captioning, Auslan, audio description, tactile, sensory and embodied methodologies) often function as generative creative practices that expand artistic form, audience experience and contemporary creative development across all artforms.	Artists / Sector / Audiences
1,3,4,6	Support disabled creatives across all genres through equitable funding and improved assessment capability	Ensure artists with disability or who are d/Deaf are supported across all forms of artistic practice, not only disability-themed or identity-based work. Strengthen this through funding guidelines that explicitly value diverse artistic practice by artists with disability or who are d/Deaf, and by investing in training and capability-building for assessment panels to improve understanding of disability-led and access-informed creative practice. This should complement, not rely solely on representation of people with disability or who are d/Deaf on panels.	Artists / Organisations / Sector
1,2,4,6	Strengthen accessibility and consistency across all funding application processes	Ensure all funding programs (including organisational, project and multi-year funding) to meet consistent accessibility standards in application design and delivery. This includes accessible digital formats, alternative submission methods where required, longer minimum application open periods, and clear information presented in plain language and multiple formats. Ensure accessibility is embedded across all funding rounds rather than limited to specific disability-focused programs.	Artists / Organisations

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
1,2,4,6	Transition and scale the existing Arts and Screen Employment Pathways Pilot Program into a sustained national program	Transition the current employment pathways pilot into a long-term, nationally funded program with expanded investment to ensure viability, continuity and sector impact. The program should provide structured pathways for artists and arts workers with disability or who are d/Deaf into sustained employment, creative development opportunities and industry participation, with clear progression pathways.	Artists / Arts Workers / Sector
1,2,4,6	Establish a leadership stream supporting pathways into governance, artistic direction and senior roles across the sector.	Establish a parallel or expanded stream focused on leadership development for artists and arts workers with disability or who are d/Deaf, supporting pathways into governance, artistic direction and senior leadership roles across the arts and cultural sector.	Artists / Arts Workers / Sector
1,4,5,6	Embed representation targets for artists with disability or who are d/Deaf within publicly funded programs and multi-year funding agreements.	Embed representation targets for artists with disability or who are d/Deaf within multi-year funding agreements and publicly funded programs, including festivals, commissions, touring and productions. Require reporting against these targets as part of funding conditions to ensure accountability and structural integration.	Artists / Arts Workers / Sector
1,4,5,6	Extend representation beyond artistic participation to include dedicated roles and increased opportunities for artists and arts workers with disability or who are d/Deaf across curatorial, producing, artistic direction and programming teams.	Extend representation beyond artistic participation to include increased opportunities and dedicated roles for artists and arts workers with disability or who are d/Deaf across curatorial, producing, artistic direction and programming teams. This ensures representation and leadership are embedded across decision-making and creative development structures, not only on stage or in finished works.	Artists / Arts Workers / Sector
1,4,5,6	Expand accessible international participation	Create expanded and sustained opportunities for artists with disability or who are d/Deaf to engage in international exchange, touring and collaboration, supported by dedicated funding and access provision to ensure these opportunities are viable and equitable.	Artists / Sector / Audiences

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
1,4,5,6	Build equitable global partnerships and leadership pathways	Develop long-term international partnerships, accessible residencies and co-creation frameworks that position artists with disability or who are d/Deaf as equal contributors to global artistic exchange, addressing systemic barriers to participation in international markets and platforms.	Artists / Sector / Audiences
1,5,6	Centre artists with disability or who are d/Deaf and access in cultural policy	Ensure the policy contains clear, explicit and ambitious commitments to artists with disability or who are d/Deaf, disability-led storytelling and accessibility, positioning these as central to Australia's cultural future rather than adjunct areas of practice.	Sector / Artists / Communities
1,5,6	Position Australia as a global leader in disability-led cultural practice	Establish a national ambition for Australia to be a global leader in disability-led cultural practice, advancing international best practice in access, inclusion and artistic development through investment, research, exchange and sector leadership.	Sector / Artists / Communities

TARGET 3. BUILD ACCESSIBLE CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AND WORKFORCES

2,4,6	Fund stewardship of the Arts and Disability Code of Practice	Provide ongoing funding for implementation, maintenance, review and sector-wide stewardship of the national Code. The Code should be treated as a living document, regularly reviewed and updated in response to sector practice and lived experience, and governed in a consistently disability-led way to ensure it remains accountable, relevant and responsive over time.	Organisations / Sector
2,4,6	Support implementation of the Code	Invest in practical implementation support including training, tools, guidance and advisory services.	Organisations / Sector
2,4,6	Introduce mandatory minimum access standards	Require multi-year funded organisations to meet minimum accessibility standards with support for continuous improvement.	Organisations / Audiences
2,3,4,6	Establish a national access accreditation and support program for cultural organisations	Develop a coordinated national access accreditation program for cultural organisations and venues, recognising demonstrated accessibility practice. The program should be paired with tailored implementation support, capacity-building and advisory services to assist organisations to meet and continuously improve accessibility outcomes, modelled on integrated approaches such as the UK's All In program and Accessible Arts' Admit All Pilot Program.	Organisations / Audiences / Sector

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
2,3,4,6	Strengthen accessibility expectations for communications and audience information within public funding	Require all publicly funded cultural organisations and programs to demonstrate commitment to accessible communications and audience information practices as part of funding agreements. This should include accessible marketing, clear and consistent access information, and continuous improvement in how audiences are informed and supported to participate. Expectations should evolve over time to reflect best practice and sector capability-building.	Organisations / Audiences
2,4,5,6	Increase disability representation in cultural governance through funding-linked benchmarks	Ensure people with disability are represented across boards, advisory bodies and decision-making structures within organisations receiving public funding. Introduce phased representation benchmarks linked to multi-year funding agreements and program investment, supported by reporting and continuous improvement expectations to strengthen sector-wide governance diversity and capability over time.	Sector / Organisations / Governance
2,4,6	Recognise the role of disability arts peak organisations	Support disability arts organisations as essential sector infrastructure delivering expertise, advocacy, training and community connection.	Sector / Organisations
2,4,5,6	Strengthen the role and sustainability of arts and disability peak bodies	Recognise arts and disability peak bodies as key facilitators, enablers and amplifiers within the cultural system that increase the effectiveness and reach of government investment in organisations and projects. Acknowledge and respond to increasing demand on arts and disability peak organisations resulting from growth in participation, representation and sector-wide accessibility expectations. Provide sustained resourcing to ensure peak bodies can meet this demand, maintain sector leadership and continue to deliver workforce development, advocacy, access expertise and system-wide capacity building.	Organisations
1,2,4,6	Embed disability-led creative methodologies within definitions of artistic practice	Ensure disability-led and access-led creative processes are formally recognised within funding guidelines, assessment criteria, curatorial frameworks and sector development programs as legitimate contributors to artistic value, innovation and cultural outcomes.	Artists / Organisations / Sector

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
TARGET 4. INCREASE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS FOR AUDIENCES			
3,5,6	Introduce audience access subsidies to support cultural participation and audience development	Support ticket affordability for audiences with disability and other access needs. Position subsidies as part of broader audience development and cultural participation strategies to build current and future audiences, strengthen engagement, and improve equitable access to cultural experiences across Australia.	Audiences
3,5,6	Recognise access as audience infrastructure	Position access as fundamental to audience participation and national cultural engagement.	Audiences / Sector
3,4,5,6	Improve access to digital participation and online cultural engagement	Support accessible digital engagement and online participation opportunities for audiences with disability and other access needs, as well as people living in regional and remote areas, ensuring digital cultural experiences are designed and delivered to be inclusive, usable and equitable as a core part of audience access.	Audiences
3,5,6	Strengthen intersectional audience engagement across cultural participation strategies	Ensure audience development initiatives reflect intersectional experiences across disability, culture, geography, language, gender and sexuality. Recognise that access needs are shaped by overlapping identities and contexts, and support culturally responsive approaches to audience engagement across diverse communities.	Audiences / Communities
3,4,5,6	Strengthen community connection and participation through disability access, inclusion and funded cultural participation programs.	Embed equity, inclusion and shared cultural participation as core objectives within publicly funded arts and cultural programs, ensuring investment supports equitable access and representation across the sector. Require funded initiatives to demonstrate how they contribute to inclusive, intersectional and community-engaged cultural practice that strengthens connection and shared civic life.	Communities / Sector

Pillar	Recommendation	Detail	Benefits
TARGET 5. BUILD NATIONAL RESEARCH, DATA AND EVIDENCE CAPACITY			
2,4,5,6	Invest in national arts and disability research	Support large-scale research into participation, workforce experience, barriers, solutions and future opportunities across the arts and cultural sector. This is needed to address gaps in national data and evidence, inform policy and funding decisions, track progress over time, and ensure investment is directed to where it will have the greatest impact in improving access, equity and cultural participation.	Sector / Government
2,4,5,6	Support evidence-based policy development	Ensure future cultural policy and investment decisions are informed by disability-led research and lived experience.	Government / Sector
2,4,5,6	Respond to growth in participation by artists with disability or who are d/Deaf through aligned investment in access and infrastructure.	Recognise the increasing number of artists identifying as disabled and the resulting growth in demand for accessible pathways, funding systems and cultural infrastructure. Ensure this growth is reflected in funding allocation, program design and sector investment, so that access, participation and support structures are adequately resourced to meet current and emerging need.	Artists / Organisations



This submission is endorsed by the following organisations:

Arts and Disability Network Australia Consortium:

Access2Arts

DADAA

Accessible Arts

Arts Access Victoria

Access Arts Queensland

Arts Access Darwin

The Aboriginal Culture, Heritage & Arts Association of NSW

Arts Law of Australia

Bangarra Dance Theatre Australia

Brand X

Bus Stop Films

CAD Factory

Chau Chak Wing Museum

Creative Plus Business

CuriousWorks

Diversity Arts Australia

Museums & Galleries NSW

Music NSW

Newcastle Writers' Festival

Old Fitz Theatre

Red Room Poetry

Seymour Centre

Sprung Dance Theatre

Sydney Opera House

Tuggeranong Arts Centre

UTP

Writing NSW

Accessible Arts welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information or contribute further to the consultation process as required.

Liz Martin

CEO, Accessible Arts

