

Submission on behalf of SA Youth Arts Collective

Organisations represented: Carclew, Ramble, D'faces, Adelaide Youth Orchestras, Windmill Production Company, Patch Theatre, SA Circus Centre – Home of Cirkidz

The South Australian Youth Arts Collective is a partnership of leading youth arts organisations working across theatre, music, circus, visual arts and multi-artform practice. Together, we engage hundreds of thousands of children and young people each year, supporting creative participation, artistic development and pathways into further learning, work and leadership.

We believe this is a critical opportunity to more clearly recognise and resource youth arts as core national cultural infrastructure.

Challenges and opportunities

Australia is facing a generational shift in how young people engage with culture. While most children still participate in some form of creative activity, research shows a decline in arts participation compared to previous generations, with the sharpest impacts felt by young people from low-income households, regional areas and marginalised communities. At the same time, young people are navigating increased digital saturation, social isolation and mental health pressures. These challenges make early, sustained and high-quality access to creative experiences more important than ever.

Youth arts organisations sit at the intersection of creativity, culture, education, wellbeing and community connection. Our work provides more than participation: it builds creative capability, critical thinking, cultural literacy, confidence, and belonging. Youth arts also play a vital workforce role, supporting artists as educators, mentors and role models, and creating pathways into artistic and cultural careers. Youth arts participation is foundational in creating active and engaged future audiences across all artforms.

Despite this impact, youth arts remains consistently under-recognised and under-resourced across national policy settings. It is often positioned as secondary to “professional” practice, rather than as the foundation on which future artists, audiences and cultural leaders are built.

What matters to us

Our organisations share a commitment to placing young people at the centre of cultural life. This includes valuing children and young people as audiences, participants and creators in their own right; supporting artists to work ethically and sustainably with young people; and designing programs that respond to place, community and lived experience.

We also know that youth arts delivers strong public value. With relatively modest investment, youth arts organisations generate significant social, cultural and economic return, including employment for artists, regional reach, strong leverage of government funding, and long-term cultural impact.

What we would like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

1. **Clear recognition of youth arts as core cultural infrastructure**, not an adjunct to other art forms, embedded across the five pillars of the policy.
2. **Sustained, dedicated investment in youth arts organisations**, recognising their role in access, participation, workforce development and future audiences.
3. **Stronger alignment between arts, education and youth policy**, including support for partnerships between professional youth arts organisations and schools.
4. **Recognition of children and young people as cultural citizens**, with agency, voice and creative rights.
5. **Support for pathways**, enabling continuity from early participation through to professional practice and lifelong engagement.

Investing in youth arts is investing in Australia's creative future.